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Good Guys and Bad Guys:
Race, Class, Gender, and Concealed Handgun Licensing

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by

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Dedication

For my grandparents Ruth Murtaugh and Audie Stroud who showed me the power of storytelling, the benefit of perseverance, and how important it is to have a sense of humor.

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Good Guys and Bad Guys: Race, Class, Gender, and Concealed Handgun Licensing

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Abstract: This dissertation explores how cultural meanings around race, class, and gender shape concealed handgun licensing in Texas. This project utilizes in-depth interviews with 36 concealed handgun license holders and field observations at licensing courses and gun ranges to understand why people get a license, what their gun carrying practices are, and how they imagine criminal threat and self-defense. Through my analysis of interviews, I find that masculinity is central to how men become gun users and why they want to obtain a concealed handgun license. Women explain their desire for a CHL as rooted in feelings of empowerment. While traditional conceptions of "fear of crime" are not a motivating factor for most of the license holders I interviewed, I find that CHL holders feel vulnerable to potential crime because they assume that criminals are armed. These interviews also suggest that perceptions of criminality are highly racialized, as predominantly black spaces are marked as threatening. As I argue, part of the appeal of concealed handgun licenses is that they signify to those who have them that they are the embodiment of personal responsibility.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On October 16, 1991, George Hennard drove his pickup truck through the front windows of a Luby's Cafeteria in Killeen, Texas. Armed with two 9mm handguns—a Glock-17 and a Ruger P-89—and at least six magazines full of ammunition, Hennard walked through the restaurant and shot people at random. Suzanna Hupp was at Luby's with her parents when the shooting started. Reportedly, as Hennard walked through the restaurant and shot people at close range, Hupp reached for her purse, fully anticipating that she would have a chance to draw the .38 revolver she had carried for most of her adult life, and fire at the assailant. Hupp writes, "Then it occurred to me with sudden and utter clarity that, just a few months earlier, I had made the stupidest decision of my life: my gun was not in my purse any longer!" (Hupp 2010, 38). Fearing that a weapon's charge could harm her thriving chiropractic practice, Hupp had decided to stop carrying a gun because it was against the law. Hennard killed 22 people, including Hupp's parents, before killing himself. At the time, it was the worst mass-shooting in American history.

The Killeen shooting happened on the same day that Congress held debates on a national crime bill that would ban semi-automatic rifles commonly referred to as "assault rifles," and high capacity magazines for semi-automatic handguns (Barrett 2012). As news of the events spread, law makers on various sides of the issue used the shooting as evidence to bolster their claims. Those in favor of the ban argued that Hennard would not have been able to kill so many people if his magazines had been limited to the standard ten rounds. For those opposed to the ban, it did not matter how many bullets

each magazine held, because changing magazines on a semi-automatic handgun takes an experienced shooter a matter of seconds.

While congress debated the national crime bill, debates at the state-level focused on whether individuals should have the right to carry concealed firearms. Beginning in the late 1980s and continuing through the 1990s, states throughout the U.S. began to loosen their restrictions on carrying concealed firearms (Wintemute 2006). In April of 1993 the Texas House approved a bill that would allow Texans with a license to carry a handgun on their body either concealed or in the open. Those who opposed the measure did so on grounds that concealed weapons holders would only contribute to violent crime. Texas Governor Ann Richards' spokesperson summarized the opposition to the bill as follows, "People who are scared, people who are frightened, people who are paranoid have absolutely no business having a gun" (Robison 1993a). Ron Wilson, a Democrat from Houston who sponsored the bill, responded to such sentiments by saying, "I don't live in a Norman Rockwell painting. I live in urban America." And he continued, "Everybody is already on the street carrying guns, but it's the wrong folks" (Robison 1993a).

Though crime was on the decline during the 1980s, the violence associated with the buying, selling, and use of crack-cocaine, led to an increase in violent crime in urban areas throughout the United States (Reinarman and Levine 1997). At the same time, semi-automatic handguns, which are much more lethal than revolvers because their magazines can hold many more rounds, became the weapons of choice for people

involved in the drug trade (Barrett 2012). The combined effect of these two phenomena led to an increase in homicides in urban areas. However, this increase in violence was not random; its primary perpetrators and victims were young people directly involved with the drug trade (Wintemute 2006). Nevertheless, the violent crime climate, and high profile mass shootings like the incident in Killeen, contributed to the push for concealed firearm legislation throughout the U.S.

In June of 1993 a concealed handgun licensing bill passed both houses of the Texas legislature. In front of television cameras, with a few dozen police officers at her side, Richards publically vetoed the bill saying, "I especially want to thank you for choosing to stand by me on this day, when we say 'no' to the amateur gunslingers who think somehow they are going to be braver and smarter with a gun in their hand" (Robison 1993b). Richards' opposition to the concealed handgun legislation drew the ire of pro-gun groups like the National Rifle Association (NRA), who financially backed her opponent, George Bush, Jr., in the next gubernatorial election. Bush, promising to make CHLs a legislative priority, defeated Ann Richards, and CHLs became legal in Texas in 1995 (South 1996).

The 1992 crime bill failed to garner enough support to become law, but it was up for debate again in 1994, and most attention was paid to the component of the bill known as "The Assault Weapons Ban." Suzanna Hupp offered congressional testimony in opposition to the ban. Presumably Hupp was asked to testify because her personal story provides a compelling narrative that would justify the importance of firearms for self-defense; indeed, since the shooting she had become a leading advocate for concealed

handgun legislation (Hupp 2010). After explaining what happened the day her parents were killed Hupp said, "I'm not really mad at the guy that did this. And I'm certainly not mad at the guns that did this. They didn't walk in there by themselves and pull their own triggers. The guy that did it was a lunatic. That's like being mad at a rabid dog. I'm mad at my legislators for legislating me out of the right to protect myself and my family."[1] In her final statement during the testimony Hupp said she was tired of hearing legislators say that assault rifles have no legitimate purposes for sport or hunting. She then said, "People, that is not the point of the second amendment…it's about our right…to protect ourselves from all of you guys up there" and with that she gestured at the congressional committee.

In this dissertation I explore the cultural meanings that shape the practice of carrying a concealed firearm for people who have a concealed handgun license (CHL) in Texas. This project utilizes in-depth interviews with 38 license holders and field observations at licensing courses and gun ranges to understand why people want a CHL, what their gun carrying practices are, and how they imagine criminal threat and self-defense. I focus on the ways in which gender shapes how people become gun users, and how they imagine vulnerability and victimization. I also analyze the ways in which race frames respondents' understanding of crime and their desire to carry a concealed firearm. As I will argue, carrying a concealed firearm with a CHL is a material practice that is supported by, and in turn supports, discourses of individualism that mask dynamics of

[1] Dr. Suzanna Hupp Testimony Before Congress on the 2nd Amendment [Video file]. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEJFAvA-ZUE.

privilege and inequality. As Hupp's congressional testimony suggests, gun advocates, including many of the CHL holders I interviewed, suggest that individual liberties are threatened both by criminals and by government policies. Though many respondents suggest that a concealed firearm is simply a tool for self-defense, they are also symbols around which much larger social meanings are made.

Effects of CHLs?

In 1996, the first year that CHLs became available, there were 115,000 licenses issued. This number far exceeded the 80,000 licenses the bill's proponents had anticipated (South 1996). The first case of a CHL holder firing his or her gun in self-defense happened just one month after they became available. In Dallas, on February 21, 1996, Gordon Hale and Kenny Tavai got into an altercation after the vehicles the two men were driving brushed side mirrors. According to a witness, when both drivers stopped at a red light, Tavai walked up to Hale's window, reached into his vehicle and started to punch him in the face. Hale pulled his .40 caliber handgun and fatally shot Tavai once in the chest (Eskenazi and Gamboa 1996). Hale was arrested and charged with murder, but a grand jury failed to indict him because he acted in self-defense (Elizondo 1996).

While the Hale case seemed to confirm to those opposed to CHLs that licenses would encourage "vigilante justice" and increase violence (Eskenazi and Gamboa 1996), there is little evidence to suggest that that is true. However, there is also little evidence to suggest that the rise of concealed handgun licensing has resulted in a measurable drop in

the crime rate. In a summary of the effects of CHL laws in the U.S., Gary J. Wintemute (2006) reports that there have been no consistent findings on the relationship between concealed firearm licensing and the rate of violent crime in either direction. In a controversial book entitled *More Guns, Less Crime* (1998), John Lott argues that concealed firearm licenses have led to decreases in violent crime. However, no other researcher has ever been able to replicate Lott's findings (Wellford, Pepper, and Petrie 2004). Wintemute (2006) says that the drop in crime that occurred during the 1990s is attributable to factors other than concealed firearm licenses, most important of which was the end of the crack boom and more targeted policing of crime hotspots.

The years preceding the passage of CHL legislation saw an uptick in violent crime in urban areas (and a steady decrease in violent crime in suburban and rural areas); however, since that time, the violent crime rate has steadily fallen. Between 1993 and 2001 the violent crime rate fell by half (Truman 2011). There has been a similarly drastic reduction in the homicide rate, which in recent years has reached lows last seen in the 1960s (Cooper and Smith 2011). Despite this dramatic reduction in violent crimes, the rate of concealed handgun licensing has been on the rise (see Table 1).

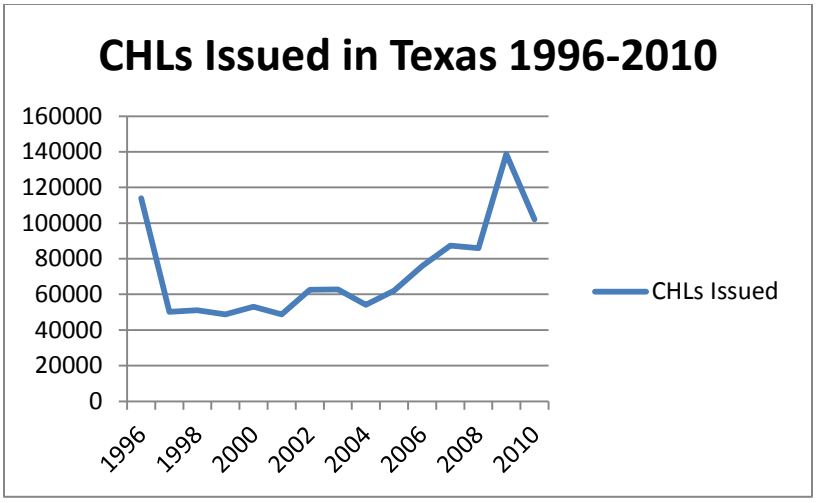

Table 1. CHLs Issued in Texas 1996-2010, Texas Department of Public Safety.

From 1997 to 2001 the annual number of licenses issued in Texas hovered around 50,000. As Table 1 suggests, licensing rates steadily increased from 2004 through 2008; however, in 2009 there were nearly 108,000 licenses issued, a 65 percent increase over the previous year (Texas DPS 1996-2010). What can account for such incredible spike in licensing?

Threats from Above: CHLs and the NRA

Ostensibly, defense from violent crime is the sole force that would motivate a person to obtain a concealed handgun license; however, to fully make sense of this phenomenon, it is critical to understand the larger cultural context in which CHLs exist. As a part of the gun industry, the factors that shape CHLs are tied to those that impact gun use more broadly. Though rates were increasing before the 2008 presidential election, there is evidence to suggest that the election stimulated the meteoric rise in licensing in 2009. Obama's election was a boon to the gun industry more generally, a

fact that is not surprising given the anti-Obama rhetoric of the National Rifle Association (NRA). During the presidential election, the NRA was heavily involved in mobilizing gun owners to vote against Obama. The organization maintained gunbanobama.com, a website whose home page features the banner, "OBAMA WOULD BE THE MOST ANTIGUN PRESIDENT IN AMERICAN HISTORY."

Another critical piece in the NRA's powerful influence is *The American Rifleman*. With over one million subscribers, the "official journal" of the NRA plays an important role in disseminating gun rights discourses. The primary purpose of the magazine is to keep NRA members informed of the latest in firearms technology and products, to provide a space for firearms merchandisers to advertise, and to provide members with up-to-date information on legislative actions and media events relevant to gun owners. The bulk of the content in the magazine is devoted to advertisements and reviews of firearms, firearm accessories, and assorted hunting paraphernalia. Every issue follows the same general format. First there is a letter from the editor, then a section entitled "Armed Citizen," followed by a column by executive vice president Wayne LaPierre called "Standing Guard," then the "President's Column," which is followed by featured stories.

"Armed Citizen" relays stories of violent crimes thwarted by private citizens using guns, while the president and vice-president almost always devote their columns to warning readers about political threats to gun rights. For example, in the February 2009 edition of *American Rifleman*, (now former) NRA President John C. Sigler writes, "The coming years of the Obama-Biden administration will be the darkest in Second Amendment history. **Every law-abiding American gun owner must be ready** (bolded

text in original). We must be ready, willing and able to defend our rights at every turn and at every level, with all of our might, all of our hearts and all of our souls. Now is the time to act."

Another useful example comes from the March 2009 issue of the President's Column,

> Everyone now knows the danger the Obama-Biden White House poses to the rights of law-abiding gun owners. We watched as President Barack Obama assembled his team from among the most anti-gun zealots to ever hold public office. With Hilary Clinton, Tom Daschle and Eric Holder in the cabinet, and Rahm Emanuel as chief of staff, America's gun owners know the dangers we face and that our friends in Congress will be mightily challenged in their defense of America's beloved Second Amendment (Sigler 2009, p. 14).

The "beloved Second Amendment" is repeatedly used in articles that focus on threats to gun owners' rights. Words such as freedom and liberty are peppered throughout such pieces, and America's founding fathers are often invoked.

The 2012 election will likely produce a similar degree of fervor around gun rights. The cover of the February 2012 issue of *American Rifleman* reads, "2012: All or Nothing Election for the Second Amendment." In that issue Vice President Wayne LaPierre writes, "If Obama is returned to the White House, if the pro-gun majority in the House of Representatives is reversed, and if Nancy Pelosi once again wraps her iron fist around the Speaker's gavel, gun owners will face the worst serial assault on our freedom ever." In a similar vein, NRA President David A. Keene writes, "We have won the political and legal arguments in one forum after another over the last decade, but we cannot forget for even a minute that those hostile to our rights and the values we share are not about to give up and will continue to find ways to attack those rights. Enemies of the Second

Amendment gather in our schools, in the media, and among the political elite." The rhetoric around political threats to gun rights is as strong as ever.

The narrative structure of *American Rifleman* is central to the discursive framing of the importance of guns in American culture. While "Armed Citizen" makes the case that guns are critical for self-defense from criminals, "Standing Guard" and the "President's Column" reminds readers that guns are central to preserving American freedom, and that those freedoms are constantly under attack through government action. While self-defense is central to why gun owners want the right to be armed, gun rights are seen as foundational to ensuring freedom from a tyrannical government, and these threats are often invoked simultaneously. These two forces can be conceptualized as threats from above (in the form of government control) and below (in the form of criminal victimization). This dual threat is the context in which any issue related to firearms, including concealed handgun licensing, must be understood.

Whiteness and masculinity are important parts of the framing of gun rights rhetoric, but they do not operate in an overt way, instead they are discursively constructed. Discourses represent the language, symbols, and systems of representation that produce "the truth" of any given topic (Hall 1997). Gun lobby rhetoric, like that described above, often employs masculine discourses to mobilize members in defense of gun rights (Melzer 2009). They do this in part through stoking fears about dire threats to personal liberty and individual freedom (Connell 1995). Additionally, this rhetoric is often racialized. To invoke the "founding fathers" as unproblematic national heroes is to

utilize discourses that signify whiteness (Leonardo 2002). Who but white Americans would rely on the example of the "founding fathers" to make an argument for liberty? Importantly, race and gender typically operate as subtext in these accounts. Nevertheless, as I will show, whiteness and masculinity are central to the meanings that shape gun rights discourse.

Gun Ownership in the U.S.

According to an October 2011 Gallup Poll, 47 percent of Americans have a gun in their home, and 34 percent of individuals report personally owning a gun (Saad 2011). The differences in these data can be attributed to the reality that in some households one person might claim ownership of the "household gun," and some people may have access to guns that they do not actually own. This distinction is important because the conflation of these two figures can overestimate the number of guns owned by women in the U.S. (Smith and Smith 1995). For example, though 43 percent of women report that there is a gun in their household, only 23 percent say that they personally own a gun. The majority of guns in households are likely owned by men, as 46 percent of adult men say that they personally own a gun (Saad 2011). The number of women who say they personally own a gun has increased considerably since 2005 when only thirteen percent of women reported owning a gun (Carroll 2005). Gun ownership is much more common among white Americans than other racial groups as 33 percent of white adults and 18 percent of non-white adults reported owning a gun in 2005 (Carroll 2005). According to data released by Gallup, it is important to be cautious about self-reports of gun ownership

as some gun owners have traditionally been wary about reporting their ownership status on surveys (Saad 2011).

While it is difficult to discern precisely how many people own guns in the U.S., it is clear that in recent years there has been a dramatic shift in attitudes about guns. For example, while 60 percent of the U.S. population in 1959 thought that handguns should be banned, only 26 percent expressed that view in 2011 (Jones 2011). Additionally, there is now more opposition to a *ban* on semi-automatic long guns known as "assault rifles" (53 percent) than there is support (43 percent) (Jones 2011). Across the board, Gallup has found that Americans have become more "pro-gun" or at least, more opposed to restrictions on guns, in recent years than ever before (Jones 2011).

Though public opinion has trended towards favoring general gun rights (Jones 2009), as of 2005 only 27 percent of Americans supported concealed firearm carry. Views on concealed firearm carrying differ greatly by gender, with 17 percent of women and 37 percent of men saying that private citizens should be allowed to carry firearms in public (Jones 2005). Even among gun owners, 54 percent feel that concealed carry should be restricted to safety officials and citizens with a clear need for carrying a firearm (Jones 2005). Yet despite this popular opinion, laws continue to expand where permit holders can carry concealed firearms. For example, in 2010 four states passed laws that make it legal for concealed weapons permit holders to carry guns in bars (Gay 2010), and federal legislation was amended to allow concealed firearms in national parks (O'Keefe 2010). Additionally, in the last few years, some colleges and universities in the U.S. have moved towards allowing concealed weapons permit holders to carry firearms on their

campuses (as some schools in Colorado have done) though many have fought such legislation (as the public university system in Texas did).

Concealed Handgun Licenses and the Law

A CHL licensee is legally allowed to carry a handgun "on or about his person" if it is not visible (*Texas Concealed Handgun* Laws 2011). By law, there are some places where carrying weapons is always prohibited. These "gun free zones" include schools, polling places, race tracks, government buildings, hospitals, nursing homes, and any establishment that receives 51 percent or more of its revenue from the sale of alcohol. According to the law, whether one has a CHL or not, carrying a weapon into any of these gun free zones is illegal, and is a third degree felony, punishable by two to ten years in state prison and a fine up to $10,000. Private property owners and business owners can determine whether or not they will allow concealed guns on their property. In most cases and unless specifically prohibited, "gun free zones" only apply to buildings, and gun carriers can leave their weapons concealed in their cars. Anyone who is found carrying a handgun on his or her person without a valid CHL license has committed a "weapons crime," a class A misdemeanor for which someone can be fined up to $4,000 and jailed for up to one year.

With the exception of Illinois, every state in the U.S. has some form of concealed handgun licensing. In each of these states citizenship is a prerequisite for obtaining a concealed carry permit. 41 of these states are "shall issue" states and eight are "may issue" states. The licensing protocol for "shall issue" states requires that if an applicant meets their states' licensing terms and remits a fee, the licensing entity of that state *must*

issue the applicant a license. In a "may issue state," licensing agencies have discretion with respect to who does and does not qualify for a license. Three states—Alaska, Arizona, and Vermont—do not require residents to obtain permits to carry concealed handguns. Most "right to issue" states have very restrictive licensing procedures. For example, in California, an applicant for a license must show "good cause" for a license by proving that they have a compelling reason to fear for their personal safety and thus need to carry a concealed weapon. Additionally, an applicant for a concealed handgun license must be deemed to be in "good moral character" by their relevant licensing agency (either the local sheriff or police department). In this instance, one's character must be vouched for by "reputable citizens" who serve as character witness.

California's licensing procedure has been hotly contested. In the 1994 California legislative session, senate bill 1650 sought to change California from a "may issue" state to a "shall issue" state. Arguments for this change have been based on data that suggest gun permitting in the state is biased. In 2009 Orange County Sheriff Sandra Hutchens notified some residents in her jurisdiction that their concealed weapons permits would be revoked. The former sheriff, under investigation for witness tampering, was discovered to be issuing permits to friends and campaign supporters who had not proven a need to be armed (Abdollah 2009). Restrictions in some "may issue" states are so severe that they are effectively "no issue" states, such as Hawaii.

In contrast to "may issue" states, "shall issue" states have a more objective licensing process. For example, to be eligible for a concealed handgun license in Texas, the following must be true:

- the applicant must be at least 21 years old and a Texas resident for no fewer than six months (though active duty members of the military are eligible if they are 18 or older);
- the applicant cannot have a felony conviction;
- the applicant cannot have a class A or B misdemeanor conviction in the five years prior to their application;
- the applicant cannot be delinquent on any child support payment collected or processed by the attorney general's office or delinquent on any local, state, or federal taxes;
- the applicant cannot have a court order or restraining order against them from a spousal relationship; and
- the applicant cannot be found to be incapable of sound judgment in the proper use and storage of a firearm (*Texas Concealed Handguns Laws* 2011*).*

Certain conditions qualify someone as being incapable of sound judgment, including any of the following: a psychiatric disorder (unless a licensed psychiatrist testifies that the condition is likely to not reappear); a mental disorder that requires continuous medical treatment; a disorder that has resulted in involuntary psychiatric hospitalization in the preceding five year period and /or inpatient or residential substance abuse treatment in the previous five years; or a diagnosis of chemical dependency. Additionally, specific diagnoses, including bipolar disorder, would result in disqualifying an applicant. If an applicant completes a firearms training course, remits a fee (typically $140) and is not disqualified on any of the above measures, he or she must be issued a license to carry a

concealed handgun. Concealed handgun licenses are good for a period of five years, after which time a license holder must complete a continuing education course in firearm safety and submit a renewal fee and criminal background check (*Texas Concealed Handgun Laws* 2011).

Who has a CHL in Texas?

As of January 1, 2011, there were 461,724 people with an active concealed handgun license in Texas (Texas DPS 2011). This figure represents 2.69 percent of the population in Texas that is 21 years-old or older. The Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) is the agency that manages the CHL licensing process for Texas residents. This office maintains demographic data by race, sex, and age of those people to whom licenses are issued, denied, and revoked. What is clear from these data is that many more men receive CHLs than women. From 1996-2010, 81% of CHLs were issued to men and 19% were issued to women. Many more whites, both men and women, were issued CHLs than any other group. In fact, more white women were issued CHLs than all of the men in every other racial group combined (see Table 2).

Race	CHLs Issued 1996-2010	Texas Population Estimates 2005-2007
White	88.6%	71.9%
Black	5.9%	11.7%
Other	3.0%	12.5%
Asian	1.8%	3.4%
American Indian / Alaskan Native	0.3%	0.5%

Table 2: CHLs Issued by Race in Texas 1996-2010, Texas Dept. of Public Safety & Texas Population Estimates, U.S. Census.

The data on race is a bit vague as there are only five options available: white, black, Asian, American Indian / Alaskan Native, "Other" and "Multi-Racial." When no category for "Hispanic or Latino" exists on a form, a large portion of this population will select "Other" rather than check that they are racially white (e.g. Swarns 2004), which is the third largest racial group behind whites and blacks. Though we can presume that this category represents a large proportion of Latinos, one is left to make inferences about exactly who this population represents. Though these data on race are somewhat ambiguous, it is clear that the majority of CHL holders in Texas are white men.

Gender and Guns

Many more men support concealed handgun licensing (Jones 2005) and have CHLs than women (Texas DPS), but it is not clear why this is the case. The ways in which gender matters in a study of firearms can be distorted by the reality that in the U.S. the vast majority of guns are owned by men (Saad 2011). Thus, a reductionist argument easily follows: guns are masculine because men use them. Yet, this simple formulation is

insufficient for explaining how and why guns and masculinity are linked. There is an alternative explanation for the relationship between masculinity and guns that is equally reductionist, but constructed in the reverse: guns are inherently masculine, thus, men use guns. This sentiment is captured by Stange and Oyster (2000, 22) when they write, "In [men's hands], the gun has served a symbolic function that exceeds any practical utility. It has become the symbol par excellence of masculinity: of power, force, aggressiveness, decisiveness, deadly accuracy, cold rationality." While a gun's capacity for domination is likely part of its appeal for some men, to understand the relationship between firearm use and masculinity, it is critical to examine larger issues around masculinity, domination, violence, and self-defense. In chapter two, I examine how masculinity and gun use are linked and explore the ways in which gender shapes men's motivations to obtain concealed handgun licenses.

From cultural iconography of the (largely mythologized) cowboy settlement of the American west, to video games wherein the narrative revolves around firearms, such as the *Call of Duty* series, the image of the American gun user is male. The appeal that guns have for men has been attributed to the idea that guns allow men to perform culturally valued versions of masculinity (Gibson 1994; Kimmel and Mahler 2003; Stretsky and Pogrebin 2007). What remains unexamined is the existence of larger gendered discourses of vulnerability and danger that are a part of cultural constructions of gun use. These constructions shape the extent to which women imagine themselves as potential gun users and have been central to how women's gun use has been explained both in the popular press and by academics who study this topic.

Cultural constructions of gender naturalize violence against women by fusing femininity with vulnerability and aggression and violence with masculinity (Hollander 2001). Add to that the construction of guns as masculine (Gibson 1994; Connell 1995; Melzer 2009), and CHL licensing for women is culturally incomprehensible. Yet, between 1995 and 2010 there were over one million CHLs issued in Texas and just under twenty percent went to women (Texas DPS). To date, there is very little gender scholarship on women who use guns for self-defense. The literature that does exist has disrupted the notion that guns are inevitably masculine by making women gun users visible (Floyd 2008; Homsher 2001; Stange and Oyster 2000); and it has suggested that women can be empowered by using guns for self-defense (Stange and Oyster 2000). In chapter three, I examine how women explain their desire for a CHL and analyze how cultural constructions of gender shape this practice.

Threats from Below: CHLs and Fear of Crime

While violent crime has steadily decreased and is currently at historic lows, public perception is that crime is on the rise. According to Gallup polling, 68 percent of Americans believe that crime is getting worse (Saad 2011). Tracing responses to this question over time reveals that attitudes about crime may have less to do with actual crime rates and more to do with feelings of general security. For example, over the course of the 1990s, as the economy boomed, most Americans believed that crime was becoming less of a problem. However, beginning in 2002, after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, sentiments changed dramatically and the number of Americans who said crime was worse than the year before went from 43 to 62 percent (Saad 2011).

To those who study fear of crime, the discrepancy between crime rates and crime fears is nothing new. Fear of crime is so pervasive in the U.S. that it is now considered a social problem separate and apart from actual crime (Warr 2000). Because fear of crime is credited with contributing to a range of social problems (Box *et al.,* 1988; Hale 1996; Humpel, Owen and Leslie 2002; Liska and Bellair 1995; Warr 2009), it is critical to understand whether concealed handgun licensing is motivated by fear of crime, to know whether in fact CHL holders are "afraid" or "paranoid" as those who were originally opposed to CHLs presumed (Robison 1993a). In chapter four I examine fear of crime and perceived vulnerability and consider whether they are motivating forces in license holders' desires to be armed.

Race and Guns

Race has played a critical role in the development of gun policies since the late 1600s. The first gun control laws were intended to keep firearms out of the hands of black slaves in an attempt to prevent slave uprisings (Cramer 1999), and one of the first actions of the KKK was to violently disarm newly freed blacks in the south (Winkler 2011). In the 1960s gun control legislation passed throughout the U.S., partly as a response to the fear induced in white Americans by images of black men with guns who were members of the Black Panthers. Prior to the 1960s, it was legal to openly carry a firearm in the state of California. However, in 1967 as members of the Black Panthers Self-Defense Organization took up arms as a response to anti-black police brutality, California legislators sought to amend firearm laws (Leonardatos 1999). In supporting legislation that would make it illegal for members of the Black Panthers to be armed in

public, California Governor Ronald Reagan remarked, "There's no reason why on the street today a citizen should be carrying loaded weapons" (quoted in Leonardatos 1999, 972). There is evidence to suggest that gun bans continue to disproportionately affect black Americans. For example, in an amicus brief filed in *D.C. v. Heller*, attorneys argued that the D.C. gun ban was rooted in racist laws that prevented black Americans from arming themselves (Tahmassebi, Cottrol and Diamond 2007).

While the image of gun-wielding black men led to new laws against carrying guns in public, the role that race has played in concealed handgun licensing is unclear. However, to the extent that fear of crime does impact a person's desire to be armed, it is critical to examine how race shapes perceptions of criminality. The literature on crime makes clear that there is a pervasive racialization of crime in the United States (Chiricos, McEntire and Gertz 2001; Davis 2007). For most Americans, the image of a criminal that comes to mind is that of a black man (Russell 2009). This is a highly consequential construct that has profound effects on the lives of black men. In chapter five, I examine how race factors into the ways CHL holders make sense of their need for a concealed firearm. I analyze not only the ways in which people of color are marked as potential criminal threats, I also explore how whiteness frames the social meanings of concealed handgun licensing.

Ostensibly, carrying a concealed firearm is a simple matter of self-defense. However, there are much larger social questions that frame the meanings of this practice. For example, while "self-defense" is the self-evident reason for supporting gun rights, the question remains—defense from what? From whom? How are these threats

conceptualized? Do men and women conceptualize threat in the same way? Do people who are armed feel safer? What role does race play in employing CHLs as a response to risk? What does this form of self-defense say about how we conceptualize community?

METHODOLOGY

Epistemological Assumptions

This research is firmly grounded in the tradition of feminist sociology which seeks to "explicitly grapple with power relations" (Rosenberg and Howard 2008, 682). Feminist methodologies were developed to counter the tendency of traditional sociological methods to marginalize the perspectives of white women and all people of color (Collins 2001; Sprague 2005). In this project I focus on people who are socially empowered; nearly all respondents are white, the majority are men, almost all are heterosexual, and most are middle to upper-middle class. This focus is not intended to privilege the perspectives of those who are already socially empowered; instead, this study is grounded in the feminist sociological tradition of "studying up" (Harding and Norberg 2005). I utilize a critical perspective to better understand the ways in which "social categories that are not marked" (Sprague 2005, 188) play a central role in the reproduction of privilege and inequality.

The primary goals of feminist sociology are empathic understanding and attention to how social constructions and power dynamics shape social interactions, including those in the research process (Naples 2000). Such a perspective has much to add to the literatures that will guide this project, including the extensive work that has been done on fear of crime. For example, utilizing feminist theoretical concepts like "doing gender"

(West and Zimmerman 1987) will help to address lingering questions in the fear of crime literature about why women fear crime more than men despite lower victimization rates (Ferraro 1996). Moreover, a feminist theoretical orientation can address the larger power dynamics of race and class inequalities that contribute to concealed handgun licensing.

In this project firearms and CHLs are analyzed as symbols around which meanings cohere, and thus, this research is also informed by cultural sociology (Edles 2002). Cultural sociologists focus on how meanings shape the ways in which social problems are culturally constructed (Griswold 1994). In the case of CHLs, it is critical to examine the meanings that both construct crime as a social problem and concealed handguns as a solution to the problem. In other words, there is nothing inevitable about utilizing firearms as a self-defense strategy, and the meanings that give rise to this form of self-defense should be analyzed for the ways in which they stem from, and contribute to, much larger social phenomena.

An additional way in which feminist sociology is important is in the research process itself. This research utilizes feminist ethnography, a perspective that seeks to capture the lives of the people who are studied as they are relayed to the ethnographer. Feminist ethnographers are attuned to how research empowers the researcher and leaves respondents at "grave risk of manipulation and betrayal" (Stacey 1988, 23). This has been identified as particularly problematic to the extent that marginalized populations are potentially further marginalized by the research process (Collins 2000). While in this project I focus mostly on groups that are socially empowered on all fronts, I take seriously the trust that respondents give to a researcher when they agree to be

interviewed. Given the highly political nature of gun debates in the United States, many respondents reluctantly agreed to participate in this project, and only did so when they felt they could trust me to responsibly handle the data that that I gathered (more on this later).

In addition to feminist sociology, this research is firmly grounded in critical race theory, which provides a paradigm for examining the various ways that ideologies of race are embedded in social structures (Delgado 2001). This ability to identify the seemingly "race neutral" and to understand how it contributes to racial inequality is one of the most important aspects of critical race theory. To use Bonilla-Silva's (2001) phrase, the United States is a "racialized social system" that benefits some and harms others. According to critical race theory, the fact of racial inequality is the starting point of analysis, and it is the job of the researcher to examine how meanings are employed that explain, excuse, justify, and thus, reinscribe racial inequality in this "post-civil rights era" (Bonilla-Silva 2001). In this project, I draw from critical race theory by analyzing the various ways in which racialized discourses shape how respondents understand crime, self-defense, and their desire to carry a concealed firearm.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Most research conducted on firearms focuses on whether they are good or bad for society (e.g. Hemenway 2004; Kleck and Gertz 1995), but my focus with this study is to critically examine the cultural discourses, particularly those that exist around race, class, and gender, that inform the worldviews of people who obtain concealed handgun licenses. In this research I rely on Laura Edles (2002, 6) conceptualization of culture, as

"systems or patterns of shared symbols and/or meaning." In-depth interviewing is an ideal method to examine how categories are used to perceive the world, and to understand the emotional schemas that people use to navigate their lives (e.g. Swidler 2001). I rely on in-depth interviewing to access the systems of meaning that are used to explain, justify, or make sense of concealed handgun licensing. I supplement those data with participant observation at gun ranges, in a CHL licensing course, and a women's handgun self-defense course. While these methods have inherent limitations, such as an inability to generalize these findings to all CHL holders, they are well-suited for examining how people understand and utilize cultural meanings.

In-Depth Interviews

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with thirty-six people who are licensed to carry a concealed handgun. To develop a sample, I first emailed CHL instructors whom I had found online through their course websites. In the initial round of emails, four instructors agreed to be interviewed. Those initial respondents contacted former CHL students to see if they would be willing to participate. Thirty-three of the interviews were face-to-face and were conducted in Texas; three respondents were interviewed over the phone (and recorded using a telephone recording device). In total, thirty-four respondents had a CHL at the time of the interview; one woman was days away from attending her licensing course; and another woman had made plans to obtain a license in the near future (and carried a firearm regularly at the time of the interview).

Eleven of the respondents were CHL instructors (eight men and three women). In total, twenty men and sixteen women were interviewed. Thirty of the respondents

identified as white, two identified as white and Hispanic/Latino, three identified as Hispanic/Latino, and one identified as Native American. All of the men were heterosexual, and all but two were married. The men ranged in age from 26 to 66 with a median age of 44. Among the women interviewed, three were partnered lesbians, two were single heterosexual women, and the remaining eleven women were married heterosexuals. The women's ages ranged from 30 to 67 with a median age of 43. Just over half of respondents reported household incomes over $81,000 per year, while ten respondents reported household incomes under $60,000 per year. Four respondents refused to answer that question (See Appendix I for complete demographic information). Though the vast majority of CHL holders in Texas are white men and white women, the absence of much racial variability in this sample means that perspectives of black and Asian CHL holders are invisible and Latino CHL holders are likely under-represented. Additionally, it is impossible to know whether the income of the respondents reflects the population of CHL holders in Texas. According to one analysis, the distribution of CHLs in Texas suggests that residents in high-income zip codes are more likely than those in lower-income areas to obtain a license (Grissom, Stiles, and Tedesco 2010). Because the fees associated with getting a CHL are typically between $200 and $250 dollars, it is likely that the expenses associated with licensing make CHLs cost-prohibitive for Texans with low incomes.

Interviews lasted between one to two hours and were conducted at locations chosen by the respondents. Sites included a gun range, the respondent's homes, and office, coffee shops, restaurants, and a church. During the interviews research

participants were first asked to describe their background experiences, including their earliest memories with guns, whether either of their parents were gun users, and at what age they received their first gun. I then asked what motivated them to get a license and whether they have friends or acquaintances who are CHL holders. The third set of questions involved their firearm carrying practices, including whether they carry a gun every day, if they avoid places where carrying a gun is restricted, and if they have ever had to pull their gun from its holster. The fourth section included questions that asked participants their views on gun free zones and gun rights (see Appendix II for the Interview Guide).

I digitally recorded and transcribed each interview, then read through each transcript to identify themes. Additionally, after I completed each interview, I took time to record my impressions of the interview process, including my initial reactions to the content of the interview. These interview memos were particularly useful in helping me to chart my evolving understanding of the dynamics that shape the worldviews of the people I interviewed.

Participant Observation

To better understand the experiences of CHL holders, I took one ten hour licensing course, attended a women's pistol course, and visited a local gun range on ten separate occasions. My experiences at the gun range were intended both to allow me to observe gun users, and to make me better acquainted with operating a handgun so that I would be able to successfully complete the CHL course. I also felt that it would help me

to establish rapport with my respondents if I developed my abilities and was able to demonstrate shooting competency.

Though I intended to utilize this portion of the research primarily as a way to observe gun users, I found that participating with shooting opened my analysis to a realm that I may otherwise have missed. Though I had not anticipated it, this research involved many moments where I experienced visceral emotional responses to the data. When respondents explained real and/or anticipated victimization, moments of vulnerability, or scenarios in which they felt threatened, it was impossible not to feel anxious. I found myself questioning my own vulnerability and self-defense strategies. I began to realize that I was developing a fear of crime that I did not have prior to starting this project. While early in the interview process I was taken aback with the degree of vulnerability that respondents reported, as the interviews began to mount, and I heard more and more stories about potential victimization, I began to see the logic of carrying a firearm in public, and I began to question what I increasingly saw as my own naiveté in not owning a gun, much less carrying one in public.

Kathleen Blee (1998, 382) says that "emotions evoked in the researcher in the process of collecting qualitative data can themselves be sources of useful data." Following Blee, I utilize my emotional responses to these data to not only heighten my empathy towards respondents, but to better understand how fear operates in constructions of vulnerability and strategies for self-defense. Unlike Blee's respondents, who used fear to intimidate her and to control the research process, my respondents seemed genuinely concerned about my inability to defend myself without a gun. I was offered

free firearm self-defense and CHL courses by a number of respondents, and I had a strong sense that such offers were made not only to help with my research, but also in the interest of my own safety.

Attention to emotion was as significant in the interview process as it was in those instances where I participated in shooting activities. Shooting a gun, particularly in the group context of the two classes I took, represented an "embodied knowledge" (Wacquant 1995) that allowed me to gain insight into the appeal of firearms for those who use guns for self-defense. The sense of power I felt when shooting a firearm was intoxicating. I cannot think of another experience that made me feel so completely capable of overpowering another person. It is a power that feels like the opposite of vulnerability.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations have been taken very seriously for this project. Respondents were provided with an IRB-approved consent form and were asked to provide verbal consent to participate. They agreed to be tape recorded and were ensured that their identities would be kept in strict confidence. All names that appear in this report are pseudonyms, and further steps have been made to ensure confidentiality, including secure storage of identifying information and vague references to where respondents live.

Reflexivity

Because firearms are so politicized and aligned with conservative politics (Melzer 2009), I had some apprehension that my position as graduate student at a university might

make it difficult for me to establish contacts with people who have a CHL. My first round of emails soliciting participation led to a response by one man confirming my hunch was correct. In my initial email I said that one benefit of participating was that participants' insights would contribute to what people know about CHLs and the "ongoing debate over gun rights and concealed handgun licensing." One person, a man I call David, replied as follows:

> I would be pleased to participate in your study. I assure you that I have all of my teeth (some paid for), don't have an extra chromosome, or call every guy Bubba, or Dude. I do have a graduate degree (Master's), but I'm also a card-carrying Christian, as well as a card-carrying NRA/TSRA member. I hope that you, being a graduate student of the most liberal university in Texas can manage to be objective. Actually, I wasn't aware of an "on-going debate."

Though he was hostile towards my email and reluctant to participate, David agreed to meet me for an interview. I later found out that he spoke with a number of instructors I had emailed and warned them about participating in the study. Fortunately, my second interview was with a woman—who I call Susan—who was very enthusiastic about participating, and with whom I quickly developed rapport. She circulated my information to her wide network of CHL instructors and former students. It quickly became apparent to me that most people who were willing to participate did so because I had been labeled "pro-gun" by Susan.

A similar process unfolded when I approached the moderator of an online forum for CHL holders and asked if I could post a request for interviews. The moderator said that forum policy prohibited solicitations of any kind, but that my research sounded interesting and she would be willing to be interviewed. A few weeks later Mary and I

met at a café in the Houston area. Early in the interview Mary was terse and forceful in her responses, and she had an intensity about her that I found extremely intimidating. As the interview went on, there was a noticeable change in her demeanor and she seemed to grow increasingly comfortable with my questions. As Mary read through the informed consent paperwork, she noted one point that she found problematic and addressed it towards the end of the interview. The consent form reads, "The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form." Mary said, "I refuse categorically to agree to that, anything [I have said] needs to be completely brought to my attention… I do not give consent to anybody else to use this but you."

Because it was clear that she was somewhat suspicious of my motives, I assured Mary that my intent was to fairly represent her views on concealed handgun licensing. Mary said, she understood, but "you've got a tape recorder and you take two or three sentences, a phrase here a phrase there, it's very easy to turn it around and make it sound…[Pause]…If you listen to what I say here, it sounds like I'm an incredibly paranoid person; I think that they're going to come and try to kill me all the time and I need to be prepared, and that's not the case." I told Mary that I had some sense that people were reluctant to participate. Mary responded, "Quite frankly, you live in Austin. You go to an Austin college. Austin is an incredibly liberal place. The concern with the conservative second amendment supporters is that…they might decide to label you as a liberal; therefore, you're here to collect information to put out a book that may be slanted. [You might] have a hidden agenda. And that's the issue."

The extent to which all ethnographers have a "hidden agenda" has been a topic of some discussion amongst sociologists, particularly those who ground their work in feminist methods (Stacey 1988; Stein 2010). Importantly, interviews are not simply reported but analyzed, critiqued, and deconstructed for the ways in which they reinforce inequalities, research participants might feel that my agenda was hidden from their view. But given that nearly all interview participants wanted to know if I was "pro-gun" and if I shot firearms, respondents' primary concerns revolved around whether or not I harbored "anti-gun" sentiments. Though I do not own a gun, I am not opposed to them. In fact, I rather enjoy shooting. Moreover, I agree with the sentiment of those who label themselves "pro-gun" that the second amendment guarantees individuals the right to bear firearms. I do not share the position that some who are labeled "anti-gun" have that the second amendment is anachronistic. When I told participants that, it seemed to put them at ease and signaled to them that my intention with this research was not to bolster an anti-gun position, but was instead to learn about their motivations for becoming CHL holders.

Though most respondents ultimately came to trust that I had no intention of crafting an anti-gun argument, those who read this (as most respondents asked to), will likely take issue with the ways in which I analyze the meanings that shape their desires to obtain a concealed handgun license, and their gun carrying practices. Turning to the tenets of feminist sociology reminds me that it is my responsibility to seek to understand and fairly represent respondents' views, while at the same time critically analyzing the various ways in which their worldviews contribute to social inequality. Stein (2010)

suggests that sociology is at its best when it deals with relevant social matters, refuses to shy away from contentious political issues, and engages readers in such a way that they might better understand the world. This engagement is fraught with the potential for controversy, but it is the job of the critical sociologist to face this challenge head-on. As Stein (2010, 567) says, "Sometimes controversy cannot, or should not, be avoided."

While I enjoy shooting guns and believe that the second amendment guarantees individuals the right to bear arms, I entered into this project curious about why someone would want to carry a firearm in public. When respondents asked me whether or not I would obtain a CHL and carry a firearm, I was honest with them that I was personally ambivalent about concealed handgun licensing. There were times during the research process, as I was developing a heightened fear of crime, when I began to see concealed handgun licensing as logical self-defense tactic in a dangerous world. However, after my interviews were completed and I began to analyze them, and to work through the various systems of meaning that inform respondents' views, my perspective on this practice began to shift. I started to see that the ethos at the heart of concealed handgun licensing is one of hyper-individualism, according to which even the most basic building blocks of society—shared sacrifice, mutual trust, interdependence—are not only considered suspect, but threats to personal liberty.

Additionally, as a feminist cultural sociologist, my focus is not only on analyzing culture but shedding light on the ways in which our meanings operate like scaffolding with which society is built. In other words, though "culture" and "society" are core components of our social world, and are only analytically distinct (Edles 2002), our

meanings are central in shaping how society is organized. As I will show, discourses of hyper-individualism leave little room for making sense of the critical importance of social forces that privilege some and marginalize others.

ORGANIZATION OF MANUSCRIPT

In the chapters that follow I present the major findings from this research. In chapter two I explore the various ways in which gun use is linked with masculinity in American culture. I review the relevant literature on guns and masculinity including work that has been done on guns in popular culture and analyses of the gun lobby. I also examine the few studies that have analyzed the ways in which masculinity is implicated in gun use.

Interviews with men who have a CHL suggest that one reason guns are linked with masculinity is because they are marked as "men's things." Men almost always identify gun use as an activity that is shared among boys and men, through hunting, target practice, and in participation with Boy Scouts. Additionally, those I interviewed suggest that guns are "manly consumer" items that some men enjoy purchasing, accessorizing, and showing off to their friends. Masculinity is also at the heart of how men explain their desires for concealed handgun licenses. The men I interviewed identify getting married and becoming fathers as moments when their sense of security and need for greater self-defense changed. Their CHLs are an extension of this need, though the extent to which they are able to use their concealed firearms to protect their families is unclear. The older men I interviewed explained that as they have aged, and their bodies have changed, they no longer feel capable of physically defending themselves like they could in their youth.

Thus, their CHLs are central to their sense of security, and they allow these men to reclaim the strength they valued when they were younger.

In chapter three I examine how women explain their gun use and their desires for concealed handgun licenses. Because patriarchal definitions of femininity have defined women as meek, gentle, and not physical, women's gun use has the potential to upend gender norms. The literature on women and guns has focused on making gun-toting women visible and critiquing the ways in which the NRA has utilized gendered discourses of vulnerability and fear to compel women to use guns for self-defense.

Interviews with women who have CHLs suggest that women are often introduced to guns through the men in their lives, as most learned to shoot from their fathers or from husbands and boyfriends. This, in conjunction with cultural representations that mark guns as the purview of men, is likely why women associate guns with men and masculinity, even when they regularly use guns for target practice or for self-defense. The women I interviewed explain their gun use and CHLs as empowering because they are able to competently handle objects defined as "men's things." They also explain that carrying a concealed firearm makes women feel empowered because their guns reduce any size difference that may exist between women and men. This is particularly relevant for women who have experienced victimization.

In chapter four I discuss the link between concealed firearm use and fear of crime. Fear of crime has been identified as a pressing social problem in the U.S. As one of the most lethal self-defense strategies available, carrying a concealed firearm might be the most forceful response to fear of crime available. According to those I interviewed,

fear of crime is not a central motivating force for those who obtain CHL. While few of the respondents I interviewed said that they fear crime, most said that they are aware of the possibility of victimization, and given that firearms are the most efficient means for responding to victimization, they are a prudent self-defense measure. It is clear that the wide availability of firearms is central to how respondents conceptualize potential vulnerability, and so they want to be armed to defend themselves.

In chapter five I analyze how race intersects with gender in shaping how license holders perceive crime. Central to my argument is that the social construction of "bad guys" is as much about imagining criminals, as it is developing a sense of self as "good." I review the literature on the centrality of race in constructions of criminality by focusing on the associations that many white Americans make between blackness and crime. My analysis of the interviews focuses on how license holders construct a sense of self as "good guys" vis-à-vis the "criminal Other." Those I interviewed seem to feel that their "good guy" status should entitle them to greater access to public places with their firearms, and there is a noticeable moral outrage over the constraints that exist for license holders in some establishments. Though the "good guy" status hinges on being law-abiding, a handful of respondents admit that they occasionally (some regularly), carry their firearms illegally. As I argue, this practice is indicative of one of the privileges of whiteness, where license holders can rest assured that others will not view them as potential criminals. This is tied to how license holders use race to gauge potential criminality in others. When explaining times that they felt vulnerable blackness and Latino-ness is often invoked to mark criminal threat. Respondents suggest that moralized

ideas about race and perceptions of cultural dysfunction shape how the license holders I interviewed understand the existence of crime. Throughout, the emphasis is always on personal responsibility, a discourse that masks privileges and reinforces systems of inequality in the U.S.

This research represents a critical analysis of an issue that is regularly in the news, but about which little has been written. As concealed handgun licensing rates continue to rise, and as laws continue to expand where license holders can be armed, it is important that a sociological analysis shed light on the social dynamics that shape this practice. Additionally, the implications of this form of self-defense extend beyond figures related to the crime rate. The practice itself becomes a part of the system of meanings that shape society. That people are armed in public to defend themselves against others has potentially profound meanings whose impact extends beyond individual license holders. In the pages that follow, I examine what those meanings are, and explore their impact on society.

CHAPTER 2: Men and Guns

According to Texas law, to obtain a CHL a person must take a ten hour licensing course that contains both classroom and range instruction. As a component of this research, I participated in such a course, taught by Bill, 38. A retired Navy man with a love of firearms and a knack for marksmanship, Bill loves to teach people how to shoot. Bill is a software engineer and emphasized to me that he does not teach CHL courses because he needs the money. Instead, he explains, "I get tired of seeing [people] learn the wrong way. I like to teach the right way."

In Texas, all concealed handgun licensing courses are required to cover the following: laws pertaining to weapons and use of deadly force; information about handgun use, proficiency, and safety; nonviolent dispute resolution; and the proper storage of firearms with a focus on eliminating "the possibility of accidental injury to a child" (Texas Penal Code §411.188). Bill presented this material using PowerPoint slides and would often interrupt himself to show the class comical YouTube videos or to engage us with crime-specific scenarios. The entire time Bill taught he was outfitted with what is known as an inside-the-waistband holster which held his semi-automatic handgun. Such a holster allows a person to carry his or her firearm completely concealed. When Bill taught proper gun handling technique, including how to check around a doorway to assess a potentially threatening situation, he replaced his real gun with a red, plastic replica of a semi-automatic handgun.

By 11:00 a.m. we had covered the first half of the classroom instruction and made our way to a nearby outdoor range where the shooting portion of the course would take

place. At the range a new student joined the class, "Derek," a white male who appeared to be in his late 30s. Because he was applying for a renewal license, Derek was required to attend the shooting portion of the course and to sit in for four hours of classroom instruction. He was outfitted with a military style "drop leg holster" that attached to his belt and strapped around his upper-thigh, and was also wearing a tactical vest carrying extra magazines. Everything about Derek's appearance suggested he knew exactly what he was doing.

Leading up to the CHL course, I had spent quite a bit of time at shooting ranges, practicing and becoming more comfortable with shooting. As a consequence, though I still had the low-grade anxiety that is present any time I use a gun, I was confident that I knew what I was doing, and that I would have success consistently hitting near the center of the target. The same could not be said for the man who stood directly to my right. "Roger," an African-American male, who I guessed to be in his late 30s or early 40s, was visibly nervous about the shooting portion of the exam. Roger had spent his career in the Army, a fact I learned when our instructor asked each of us how long we had been shooting firearms. Despite his ostensible experience, Roger was having a hard time loading ammo into the gun's magazine. He tried using a small tool called a magazine loader—a tool that our instructor openly chided him for using—but still struggled. With shaky hands, Roger dropped rounds on the ground and asked Bill for help. Bill playfully mocked the fact that Roger was in the Army and could not load his own gun. None of this helped his confidence, which was unfortunate given we were about to begin shooting.

The licensing test entails shooting twenty rounds at a distance of three yards from the target, twenty rounds from seven yards, and ten rounds from fifteen yards away. The target is 27 inches wide and 35 inches tall. Each shot within a twelve inch ring around the center of the target (rings 8, 9 and center) is worth five points. Shots within the number seven ring are worth four points. Any shot that misses the rings but hits the target is worth three points. The maximum score a shooter can receive is 250 points, but to pass the test a score of 175 or better is required.

Illustration A: Example of a standard target for CHL qualifying. This target measures 24 inches across and 45 inches vertically.

When it came time to fire at the target, Roger was not very accurate. Though he was proficient enough to pass the test, his shots were consistently outside the rings. As we completed our shots at three yards, Roger openly questioned how he was going to hit the target from fifteen yards away. "Where is the line at?" he asked as he anticipated moving back. Many of his shots hit outside of the largest ring, and even at seven yards a few shots missed the target all together. Occasionally, Roger would look to his left at my

target and to his right at another shooter's target and remark on how poorly he was doing. He offered that the only firearm training he received in the Army was in basic training over sixteen years ago, and even then, he was only trained to shoot M-16s. "We were never trained to shoot a handgun," Roger explained to me. Later, as we stood around and waited for Bill to score our targets, I asked Roger what he did for the Army. In an almost apologetic way replied Roger replied, "I'm an accountant."

I rode with Bill from the shooting range back to the pre-fabricated building where the classroom instruction would continue. As we drove, he talked about Derek's appearance and mocked him for wearing tactical gear. He said that it "says a lot" when a guy feels like he needs to dress like that on a shooting range. "He looks like he was in the military or something," I offered. Bill explained that Derek was Special Forces in the Air Force, a fact he gleaned when he spotted an emblem on Derek's vest. After everyone arrived at the building and we settled into the classroom, Bill changed his holster from an inside-the-waistband to an outside-the-waistband holster. Now his semi-automatic handgun was visible to all of us.

Gender is a central organizing principle in society (Risman 2004), and it is at the heart of the experiences described above. Because men are considered masculine to the extent that they can master "manhood acts," (Schrock and Shwalbe 2009), Roger likely felt anxious as he struggled to shoot. The ridicule levied against him by the instructor is typical among men, who often use put downs as a way to shore-up their own masculinity (Pascoe 2009). Bill's critique of the way Derek was dressed seemed to stem from his

feelings that Derek was trying to prove something by wearing tactical gear to the gun range. While Bill mocks this attempt to seem manly, his use of the outside-the-waistband holster when we returned to the classroom struck me as a similar strategy. While the licensing course experiences of demonstrating one's shooting prowess and showing off one's firearm provide license holders with an opportunity to "do masculinity" for the approval of others, these experiences represent rare opportunities for CHL holders, who must keep their firearm concealed in public or risk being charged with a weapon's crime. Given that a license holder's firearm must remain concealed, what role does masculinity play in concealed handgun licensing?

In this chapter I analyze how masculinity shapes concealed handgun licensing. I begin by examining the ways in which masculinity shapes how and why guns are marked as men's objects. Then I explore how men explain their desires to obtain a concealed handgun license. I begin by reviewing the literature on gender, guns, and masculinity.

MASCULINITY THEORY

At its most basic, gender "provides the 'rules' (which originate in cultural messages) of appropriate behavior for women and men" (Crawley, Foley and Shehan 2008, 5). While these cultural expectations are often explained as natural or the result of biology, sociologists of gender argue that they are instead socially constructed, the result of agreed upon meanings rather than inevitable truths. Gender discourses construct what "we know" to be true about men and women, and these discourses constrain the possibilities we all have for enacting gender. One of the most fundamental common sense ideas about gender is that men and women are "opposites." Thus, meanings around

masculinity are foremost concerned with maintaining distance from femininity and men and boys are often encouraged to distinguish themselves from those attributes that are associated with women and girls (Kimmel 2010). Such gendered distinctions are important facets of patriarchal societies wherein men and masculinity are privileged while women and femininity are devalued (Connell 1995). This fundamental tenet of masculinity explains why many young men openly mock and ridicule failed gender performance (Pascoe 2010).

Because gender is something that must be accomplished in interaction, rather than a stable identity (West and Zimmerman 1987), men experience a "chronic uncertainty" about their masculinity that compels them to seek ways to prove that they measure up to cultural standards of manhood; standards that include "being strong, successful, capable, reliable [and] in control" (Kimmel 2010, 114). Importantly, this drive to prove one's masculinity happens primarily in dynamics with other men. Thus, "Masculinity is a *homosocial* enactment. We test ourselves, perform heroic feats, take enormous risks, all because we want other men to grant us our manhood" (Kimmel 2010, 118). In patriarchal societies men are "granted manhood" to the extent that they are dominant over women and other men (Connell 1995). One way to be dominant is to use domination, and so violence is one strategy men and boys have available to achieve masculinity (Connell 1995). Kimmel (2010, 121) says that the willingness to use violence, is the "single most evident marker of manhood."

Though violence is an important facet of masculinity, there is a certain amount of ambivalence about violence in American culture. Ritualized violence is a celebrated part

of sports (Messner 1992), and a prominent narrative device in action films (Donovan 2010) and video games (Goldstein 2005); however, violence is also a much criticized phenomenon (Herrenkohl et al. 2011). Criticisms of violence in media are as old as the forms themselves (Grimes, Anderson, and Bergen 2008), and there is a growing awareness of the costs of violence. For example, while "head-ringing hits" were once highly valued in football, troubling evidence about the permanent physical and neurological damages of such violence have led to efforts at reform (O'Connor 2011). Additionally, highly publicized school shootings by adolescent boys have compelled some to question our cultural endorsement of violence in media (Mifflin 1999).

Media is a site of much critical analysis because it is one of the modes by which cultural messages about gender circulate. It is from media that many of us learn what is expected from, and most admired in, men and women (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008). These cultural messages become the material with which we learn how to "do gender" successfully. Indeed, media representations are part of the discursive formation of any subject position.

Guns and Masculinity in Popular Culture

From *Gunsmoke* to *Terminator*, firearms have enjoyed wide visibility in American popular culture. In the early days of television, Westerns linked guns with heroic masculinity as male lead characters routinely saved the day when danger lurked (Mitchell 1998). More contemporary representations have taken on a decidedly more militarized and muscular form. Beginning in the 1980s cultural representations of heroic masculinity have revolved around "hard bodies," men who typically have massive

muscles and huge guns (Jeffords 1994). According to James Gibson (1994), such representations emerged as a cathartic response to the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, and as an answer to what some saw as the weak foreign policy of the Jimmy Carter administration. This trope is perhaps best exemplified by the *Rambo* series. Gibson (1994) argues that these representations were part of a larger "New War" ethos in American culture that was characterized by a constellation of cultural meanings around physical toughness, aggression, and militarism.

Gibson, who spent a week at an elite handgun training school to gain firsthand experience of paramilitary culture, argues that in the "New War ethos" power, force, and might are celebrated as socially necessary. In this discourse the more powerful the gun, the more capable the defense, and "good men" are those who are able and ready to defend the defenseless. Firearms endow their users with strength, power, and moral right. Gibson argues that through movies, paintball competitions, and high-level firearms training, men are able to engage in "masculine fantasies" of simulated violence. The proponents of the New War ethos work to articulate and defend a worldview perhaps best summarized by the following:

> 'Practicing' liberals deny some fundamental truths; above all, they refuse to recognize the absolute reality of evil. By insisting that there are no bad men, but only bad social conditions, liberals fail to see that criminals, terrorists, and Communists commit their horrendous acts because they feel pleasure in killing, raping, and kidnapping. They are men who have lost self-control and succumbed to their desires—and their desires are infinite. Infected with evil, criminals can neither be contained nor reformed as liberalism would have it; they must be eliminated (Gibson 1994, 74).

Thus, the New War ethos sees good and evil in perpetual battle and liberalism as a naïve and dangerous response to this reality. Firearms are central to how the New War is waged. According to Gibson, this is a "matter of 'good' versus 'evil,' and whichever side had the most guns wins" (1994, 254).

The latest manifestation of virtual displays that link heroic masculinity with firearms exists in the form of video games. The rise of first person shooter games (FPS) during the late 1990s and throughout the 2000s allow users to insert themselves into the dramas of the New War ethos Gibson chronicled. FPS games take the perspective of the person who is playing by using on screen animation that typically has arms extended with weapon in hand as a player navigates the game's terrain (see the image below for an example). Most FPS games are structured around complex and detailed narratives of war (e.g. *Call of Duty*), post-apocalyptic scenarios (e.g. *Halo*), or both. The player is typically the hero of the narrative who only beats the game after an elaborate mission is accomplished. According to one analysis of FPS games, the narratives usually revolve around "saving the world, restoring humanity, and fighting the forces of evil" (Hartmann and Vorderer 2010, 110). In this way, video games represent an interactive experience with the New War ethos. Unlike the films Gibson analyzed, FPS games "permit gamers to see themselves on screen as the noble hero…Here, the *player* of the game *is* the story" (Power 2007, 285).

While the video gaming industry reported $10.5 billion in sales in 2009 (Siwek 2010), at least one game is available as a free download. *America's Army* is a first person shooter game developed and financed by the U.S. government as an Army recruiting tool.

The game allows "players to virtually explore and 'experience' the Army from basic training through to deployment and live situations that might be found in the so-called Global War on Terrorism" (Power 2007, 279). According to its website (www.americasarmy.com), "*America's Army* is one of the ten most popular PC action games played online. It provides players with the most authentic military experience available, from exploring the development of Soldiers in individual and collective training to their deployment in simulated missions." Having the opportunity to virtually train in the use of "real life" firearms is central to the FPS gaming experience.

Illustration B: Still shot of a scene from "America's Army," an FPS game developed by and for the U.S. Army.

Though the video game industry disputes these findings, research that examines FPS games consistently finds that playing violent video games increases aggression (Anderson and Bushman 2001), and the more lifelike the violence, the more significant

the effects (Sherry 2001). Additionally, there is some evidence to suggest that with FPS games, the line between fictional masculine fantasies of heroic violence and "real life" events may be blurred: reports from war zones suggest soldiers refer to combat with language that originated in video games (Power 2007). One soldier, describing what it was like to join the military says, "The [first person shooter] games we used to play had just become reality" (Wermund 2011).

As Gibson (1994) suggests, the fantasy of using guns to fight "bad guys" is not only an acceptable form of violence in U.S. culture, it is also celebrated. The distinction between "good guys" and "bad guys" is central to how violence is evaluated. "Good guys" are good to the extent that they follow the rules and use violence only when necessary, while "bad guys" are those who refuse to follow rules, and who seem to take pleasure in violence for violence's sake. Thus, violence and domination in themselves are rarely critiqued, while simulated fantasies of heroic violence become ideal ways to engage with celebrated versions of masculinity.

The role of fantasy in construction of "good guys" and "bad guys," is important to consider. Fantasy has been used throughout history to capture an imagined essence of manhood. Writing about early 20th century social changes that threatened white American males' definitions of masculinity, Kimmel (1996, 118) says, "If manhood could no longer be directly experienced, then perhaps it could be vicariously enjoyed by appropriating the symbols and props that signified earlier forms of power and excitement." Though Kimmel was explaining how the American West became a symbolic resource for constructing masculine fantasies of domination, the same project

may be at the heart of action films, FPS video games, and perhaps even, carrying concealed handguns.

The Gun Lobby

Films and video games are not the only cultural artifacts that shape the discourse around guns and masculinity. R.W. Connell argues that the gun lobby is engaged in masculinity politics, "those mobilizations and struggles where the meaning of masculine gender is at issue and with it, men's position in gender relations" (1995, 205). The gun lobby has been active in producing meanings of masculinity as it works to expand gun rights, even in the face of public outcry over the danger of guns. Connell references a 1987 shooting known as the "Queen Street Massacre" that happened in Melbourne, Australia, when a twenty-two year old man killed eight people in an office building (Kearns 1997). In the wake of the killings, despite public opposition to guns, the gun lobby mobilized to defeat a gun control candidate. In such instances, Connell argues that the gun lobby is able to defeat opponents of gun control by explicitly appealing to discourses of masculinity. By evoking concepts like security, family values, or individual freedom, the gun lobby works to make masculinity "a principal theme, not taken for granted as background" (1995, 205).

Scott Melzer (2009) utilizes Connell's framework to analyze how the National Rifle Association (NRA) exploits popular understandings of guns as masculine symbols to mobilize its members. Melzer attended NRA conventions, analyzed the history of the organization, and interviewed its members to understand how the NRA has used masculinity discourses to become the most powerful lobby in the U.S. He argues that

gun ownership is associated in NRA discourse with self-reliance, rugged individualism, and a strong work ethic, a constellation of traits that Melzer refers to as "frontier masculinity." He writes that, "guns and masculinity have long been inseparable" (2009, 30) thanks to mythologized narratives of the American frontier. These narratives appeal to working and middle class white men who are threatened by the civil rights and feminist movements. According to Melzer, the predominantly white male membership of the NRA is motivated to act in defense of guns because they symbolize individual freedom.

The NRA's magazine *The American Rifleman* is the most popular of the organization's monthly publications. Kevin O'Neill (2007) examines how the magazine's section "Armed Citizen" relays stories of violent crimes thwarted by private citizens using guns. For example, the author cites one story that tells of a man whose children rushed into his room in the middle of the night to tell their father that two men were breaking into their home. The father, who was disabled, grabbed a handgun, shot one of the intruders and held him at gun point until the police arrived. O'Neill finds that most of the victims in these stories are women, the elderly, or in some way disabled or in failing health. He argues that these "classically vulnerable" people heighten the narrative structure of the stories, because as otherwise helpless victims, they are able to "achieve masculinity" with firearms. According to O'Neill, the NRA uses discourses that simultaneously construct masculinity and terror, and they produce "especially vigilant, kind of citizen who is distinctly masculine in character" (459). The NRA is able to use

its monthly publication to circulate stories of "real life heroes" who use guns to defend the defenseless.

The literature on the NRA illustrates how this powerful lobby links gun use with what is known as "hegemonic masculinity." According to Connell (1995, 77), hegemonic masculinity is a "configuration of gender practice" that legitimizes patriarchy as idealized and culturally celebrated representations of masculinity are set in contrast to women and marginalized versions of masculinity. The NRA discursively constructs hegemonic masculinity through its production of the ideal gun user: people who heroically defend the defenseless (O'Neill 2007), and who care deeply about "American virtues," particularly individual freedom (Melzer 2009) and family values (Connell 1995). While media representations of heroic masculine fantasies circulate in popular culture through movies and video games, the NRA constructs a discourse of "real life" gun use. These NRA discourses "provide a cultural framework that may be materialized in daily practices and interactions," and thus represent what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, 850) call a "regional" hegemonic masculinity. Though it is important to understand how masculinities emerge in particular contexts, what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) call the "local level," dominant culture frames and shapes the possibilities for enacting preferred versions of masculinity in everyday life.

Gun Use in Real Life

Most of the research on the gendered meanings of firearms has been limited to the types of discourse analysis described above. Very little work has been devoted to exploring how gender shapes the ways that men actually use guns. There is a clear

reason for this: very few opportunities exist for people to use guns in the heroic ways that are culturally celebrated in media. While guns do not have to be fired to be useful in constructing masculinity (see Stroud 2012), there has been scant research on firearms as symbols around which meanings are made.

Those studies that have explored how men actually use guns have focused on the commission of violent crimes and on what Connell might label "alternative" or "marginal" masculinities. Marginal masculinities fail to measure up to the hegemonic ideal by virtue of race and class (Connell 1995). Messerschmidt (1993) argues that race and social class structure opportunities for boys and men such that those who lack the resources needed to achieve masculinity through legitimate means (e.g. a high status job) can resort to crime and violence. Indeed, it is because of the link between dominance and masculinity that men perpetrate most criminal activity, including violent assaults (Britton 2011).

In this vein, Kimmel and Mahler (2003) analyze random school shootings in the U.S. All of those shootings were perpetrated by boys and young men and "all or most of the shooters had tales of being harassed—specifically gay-baited—for inadequate gender performance" (Kimmel and Mahler 2003, 1440). By using firearms to commit acts of violence, these boys attempted to move from margin to center, from being the wimp who was picked on to the aggressor who dominated and controlled others. Similarly, Stretesky and Pogrebin (2007) interviewed gang members serving prison time for violent crimes. The authors found that the reputations of both the gang and the individual gang member were determined by their willingness to defend their honor and to be seen as

masculine. The primary way this was accomplished was by using firearms. The authors write, "Guns provide gang members with a sense of power" and guns "help gang members project a tough image" (Stretesky and Pogrebin 2007, 90). Because guns are so lethal, they imbue their users with traits associated with masculinity—control and power.

Taken together the literature on guns and masculinity reveals a gaping hole that has implications for how we understand both the way guns factor into cultural constructions of masculinity and how hegemonic masculinity operates. On the regional level, guns factor heavily in displays of masculine violence that are celebrated in action films through fantasies of "good guys" killing "bad guys" (Gibson 1994). The gun lobby taps into and expands this discourse by tying guns to American virtues (Connell 1995; Melzer 2009; O'Neill 2007). But the only analyses that examine how real men use guns to construct masculinity have focused on criminal uses by men who embody marginalized masculinities (Kimmel and Mahler 2003; Stretesky and Pogrebin 2007). Thus, while on the regional level it is clear that guns are discursively linked to hegemonic masculinity, it is unclear how men on the local level might use guns to construct versions of masculinity that are celebrated in culture.

In this chapter I examine the relationship between masculinity and guns through an analysis of the experiences of CHL holders. First, I explore how men become gun users by focusing on how they are socialized to use guns as children and analyzing how men talk about guns as masculine consumer objects. I then transition into a discussion of how men explain their desires to obtain concealed handgun licenses. The men I interviewed identify getting married and becoming fathers as moments when they felt

especially vulnerable. I also find that bodies, and their ability to communicate vulnerability, are central to how men understand self-defense.

GUNS AS MEN'S THINGS

While demographic data on gun ownership is notoriously difficult to gather, the most recent figures suggest that 46 percent of men and 23 percent of women own a gun (Saad 2011). Though a CHL can be acquired without actually owning a gun (most licensing instructors offer gun rentals), it is likely the case that the vast majority of license holders are gun owners. Thus, to understand how gender shapes people's desires to become licensed to carry a gun in public, it is important to understand the various factors that make gun ownership a male-dominated phenomenon.

Fathers, Sons and Guns

One of the primary ways that the men I interviewed were introduced to guns was through hunting with their fathers when they were young. This was the case for the seven of the twenty men interviewed for this project. What is interesting about these interviews is the fondness with which the men recall their early experiences, and the gendered framing they use to relay these stories. For example, Mike, 36, recalls in rich detail how the rural town in Mississippi where he grew up would shut down on opening day of deer season. Mike says, "When we're talking about a six year old hunting, it's really a six year old going out and shooting, you know, birds. Just anything that was moving around. [It's] kind of priming for real hunting, is the way I looked at it." He continues, "I remember going on my first deer hunt with my dad, sitting on a power line [that had been] cut through. [I] didn't see anything that day. I think I carried my B.B.

gun along and he had his rifle." Eventually Mike was introduced to a .22 rifle and somewhere around the age of ten his father gave him a .410 shotgun. He recalls the first time his he shot his uncle's .357 revolver, "I remember shooting [my dad's] big 12 gauge, and it would knock me over."

In Mike's experience, hunting is an activity that men and boys share. The rich details that Mike used to describe hunting with his father, and the ease with which he told me the story suggested that he has thought about, and perhaps told, this story often. Yet, he was a bit taken aback when I asked if his sister was ever involved in such activities. Mike says, "Honestly, I don't remember about my sister. That's a good question. I'll have to ask her that."

Similarly, George, 40, discusses how he and his father would hunt together when he was a child. His sister hunted with them when she was young but then, George says, "she drifted apart doing girl stuff." George tells a similar story to that of Mike's about the first time he shot a 12 gauge shotgun around age seven. George says he pulled the trigger and, "BOOM!…I fell on my back. I was a little kid…I knew that if I complained about it [my father] wouldn't let me shoot anymore till next year. So I said, okay, give me another one. And that was it. I was hooked after that." George described the initial experience as painful and loud, but he "sucked it up" and continued to hunt with his father as a child. For a time, George and his father drifted apart. However, he says that recently his father has been asking him to go hunting more, and they have used the activity to bond. When I asked George if his mom or wife ever hunted he said his mom went once but because it was raining and cold, she was "miserable." As for his wife,

"[She] says that's my deal. That gives me my opportunity to hang out with the guys or whatever."

In these hunting stories firearms are marked as things used primarily by men and boys. Being taught to shoot a gun by one's father is a memory that many of the men look back on fondly. These memories are symbolized by firearms that some of the men have inherited from fathers and grandfathers. This was especially poignant for Mike who, after his parents divorced, had a long and painful falling out with his father. When Mike was in college, his father was diagnosed with late-stage cancer. Mike says, "We reconciled to the best that we could. You know, not knowing my dad, reconciling with him, with a guy who doesn't express emotions or talk about feelings…is a difficult thing. But I think we reconciled." When Mike asked his father for something that he could have to remember him by, he was given his father's prized .30-.06 deer rifle. Mike says, "And I was really proud that he gave it to me. This is Dad's deer rifle. You know? I took it back home and even though I hadn't been deer hunting much at the time, I felt this kind of connection to my childhood and [pause] hunting and Dad and all that stuff." This connection to his father and the pastime they shared is symbolized in the deer rifle that Mike inherited. Indeed, for some men, firearms are symbols of the relationship between fathers and sons.

According to the men I interviewed, hunting provides an opportunity to spend time with their fathers and relate to them in ways they may not have been able to otherwise. When Mike says his father was not one to talk about emotions and feelings, he conveys that this hampered their ability to forge a relationship. Hunting was one way

Mike felt connected to his father. Patriarchal gender norms discourage emotional expression by men (Connell 1995), but hunting allows for a masculine way to establish and nurture relationships between fathers and sons. Though this pastime certainly could be shared with women and girls, this was not common. Instead, hunting is conveyed by these men as a male-centered endeavor.

The absence of girls and women in the stories about hunting marks the activity as primarily something that fathers and sons do together. Those men who had children in the home did not suggest that they purposely exclude their daughters from participating, but because the activity is clearly marked as male-centered it is unlikely that girls and women will be interested in hunting. For example, Joseph, 44, says that when his daughter was young she would hunt with him. Joseph says she hunted "Till…she was about five. And now, she's a girl." Now his daughter is grown and has a daughter of her own. Joseph says his granddaughter "Loves to shoot guns. Yeah, I took her out to the deer lease, just me and her. We spent the night and a campfire. You know, the whole nine yards." Joseph's explanation suggests that though girls can hunt, it is a distinctly masculine activity. This was reinforced when his wife Anne, who was present for the interview, said that she does not like to hunt because it is too cold and there are no restrooms at the deer lease. Anne says, "[Hunting is] his thing. You know. So, I'm not opposed to it. If he's goin' hunting, I'm goin' shopping." This explanation makes it clear that for Anne, hunting is a masculine activity and thus is more appealing to men; she would rather spend her time doing something more feminine: shopping.

Three of the men I interviewed did not have a father in their lives. For these men, the absence of a father also meant the absence of growing up with someone to teach them to use firearms. David, 66, spent most of his childhood in foster care after his mother had a nervous breakdown. According to David, one impact of not having a father was that, "unfortunately, my understanding of manhood was learned through the movies. And so, you know, I had certain idols, cowboy idols." David's first experience with a firearm was when his mom bought him a .410 shotgun at the age of fourteen. Though she was not personally a gun user, "she thought it's good that children are trained properly with firearms." Without a father to teach him about guns, David looked to masculine representations on television and in movies and say that the reason he bought a .30-.30 rifle and a western style revolver as an adult was because of the "romantic appeal" (these are the guns most commonly associated with western iconography).

A similar story was told by Jeff, 45. Jeff's father died when he was eight years old. As we talked about his early experiences with guns it was clear that the absence of his father was something that still pained him. Recently Jeff's uncle told him that his father not only shot guns, but was a very accurate shooter. Jeff says there were, "Times when [my father] came to Texas to visit [and] they'd go out to hunt rabbits. And my Dad could hit a running rabbit with a .45…I had no idea." It was clear that this news about his father's interest and abilities in shooting was a source of pride for Jeff, and provided him an opportunity to feel a bond with a man who died nearly forty years ago. Because these men did not have fathers to socialize them into hunting and shooting, they felt they were denied an experience to which many American boys are entitled. When I asked Jeff

if he felt a sense of loss at not having that experience he said, "[Yeah]. But, it's just another one of those things. Gosh I wish we could've shot together. Oh, well. I'm sharing it with my kids." Half of the men I interviewed told stories about either bonding over firearms with their fathers as children or bonding with their children now that they are fathers.

For nearly all of the men who have been lifelong gun users, early hunting experiences were central to how they were introduced to guns. Those men who did not have fathers in their lives did not have the opportunity to learn how to shoot from them, and they expressed this as a sense of loss. Hunting is marked as masculine both in the absence of women and in the explanation for why women do not enjoy the activity (e.g. because of the weather or the lack of facilities). Though in the ways men explain it, hunting is clearly gendered, it is an activity laden with deep emotions, particularly for those men who said that hunting allows them to bond with their otherwise distant fathers.

Boy Scouts

Of the twenty men I interviewed, two recall that their earliest experiences with shooting guns happened when they were members of Boy Scouts of America. For example, Paul, 34, says that there were not any guns in his house when he was a kid. He says, "Actually I think my dad had one, but it was nothing I ever saw in the house. I think it was [because] my mom didn't like guns." Though when he was younger, Paul did not have the opportunity to regularly shoot guns, they were a part of Paul's family legacy: he inherited a .410 shotgun from his great- great-grandfather, an item he was clearly proud of. The first time Paul remembers shooting a firearm was around the age of

10 or 12 when was in Boy Scouts. That experience involved shooting five rounds with a .22 rifle at a paper target. He says that as an older scout, the shooting activities include trying to shoot out the flame of a lit candle at night.

Though most of my respondents made no mention of participating in Boy Scouts, the organization is likely the first introduction to shooting for many American boys. The NRA is very actively involved in encouraging and supporting the Boy Scouts of America (BSA), as is evidenced in the following passage from *The American Rifleman,*

> Of the millions of boys who have proudly worn the BSA uniform, uncounted numbers (including these authors and the editor-in-chief of this magazine) were given the opportunity to handle and shoot their first guns during Scouting-sponsored events. NRA training counselors, certified instructors and range safety officers today provide safe and educational environments for Scouts to learn firearm safety and be introduced into the shooting sports at hundreds of BSA summer camps and range-day activities. The NRA Foundation has provided 1,468 grants totaling $4.9 million to local Scout councils, camps and troops to acquire training materials and equipment and to establish camp range programs across the country. NRA staffers participate in the National Jamborees to provide tens of thousands of Scouts an opportunity to experience firearm use and learn how to safely handle and care for firearms (Schreier and Horak 2010).

One of the NRA's missions is to promote the shooting sports (hunting, target practice, etc.), so on the one hand, the NRA – BSA relationship is unremarkable. However, this organizational relationship is important when one considers the larger discursive framing of gun use and masculinity by the NRA and the BSA.

As was discussed earlier, the NRA is actively involved in promoting an image of the ideal gun user (Connell 1995; O'Neill 2007), an image that is largely produced by utilizing discourses of "American virtue" and masculinity (Melzer 2009). Similar constructs shape the core mission of the Boy Scouts, and have since its founding in 1910

(Kimmel 1996). By teaching boys sports, camping, and civic participation, the BSA is engaged in producing an idealized image of what boys should be that melds mythic themes of masculinity and American virtue. As an iconic experience of American childhood, the organization is far more significant in contributing to discourses than might be suggested by the sheer numbers of those who participate in its ranks. Though only two respondents explained that their first experiences with firearms happened as Boy Scouts, the organization plays an important role in the larger discursive framing of masculinity and firearms in the U.S. Tellingly, marksmanship is not an activity that Girl Scouts of America promotes.

The Barbie for Men

In addition to hunting and Boy Scouts, there is a third way in which guns are framed as masculine: they are "manly" consumer objects. In many cases, guns were discussed as "men's toys" and as having intrinsic masculine appeal. For example, Richard, 38, discussed his desire to purchase an AR-15 rifle, one of the military style black rifles that were illegal under the "assault rifle ban" that lapsed in 2004. Richard spoke at some length about how he loves to purchase guns that can be accessorized. Some of the more popular firearms are sold in such high quantities that there is a large market of options that can be used to make specific changes to the gun. About the AR platform rifle, Richard says, "I joke [that] it's the Barbie for men. It's just that I can buy stuff for it, still increase my use out of it, without buying a whole new gun." Richard's Barbie analogy emphasizes that firearm use is, at least in part, fun for Richard, and his

interest in being a gun owner is not simply about self-defense. This is likely part of the explanation for why Richard does not carry his firearm in public despite having a CHL.

In contrast, Paul is one of the eleven respondents who said that he carries a firearm with him whenever possible. When I asked him how carrying a firearm factors into his everyday routine as he leaves his house, Paul, like most people who carry regularly, explained that as soon as he gets dressed, his gun goes on his hip. Because many of the men who carry on their bodies have to use a gun that is small enough to be concealed, I asked if there is ever a time he decides to carry a larger, higher caliber gun, for example, if he is driving in an area of town he perceives is unsafe. Paul says, "[No]. I mean I have others that I could carry and I will carry at times just because I think they're, I don't know, a little more fun. [Laughs]." Paul followed up by saying, "I went out with a buddy of mine last weekend…I hadn't shown him yet. So I decided to carry that one instead of the normal one. It gets to the point, it's kind of like women with purses—they like to show off what they get." Like Richard's Barbie comment above, Paul suggests that part of the appeal of guns is that they are fun to buy and fun to show to friends. Though shopping is marked as a feminine activity, shopping for guns is masculine. As Paul suggests, his new firearm becomes an object that he can show off for the approval of his male friend. While most of my respondents describe guns as "tools of self-defense," they are not simply utilitarian; they are also consumer objects and "men's toys."

To fully understand why men are much more likely to be gun owners and CHL holders than women, it is critical to examine the factors that shape gun use as masculine.

In addition to the cultural representations that link masculinity and firearms (e.g. in films and video games), the men I interviewed explain that the contexts in which they learned to be gun users were male dominated. Specifically, many of these men were socialized to use guns when hunting with their fathers. The discursive framing of guns as masculine is reinforced by an iconic experience of American boyhood: learning to shoot as a Boy Scout. Though only two of the men I interviewed learned to shoot guns in this context, the cultural impact on the masculinity and guns discourse is significant. Finally, the men I interviewed discursively framed guns as masculine when they spoke of firearms as "men's toys." Such framing suggests that part of the appeal of guns for men is that they can take pleasure in guns as consumer objects.

The fact that guns are marked as masculine helps to explain why so many more men own guns than women (Saad 2011). However, it does not explain why fully eighty percent of concealed handgun license holders in Texas are men. To understand that phenomenon, I now turn to a discussion of why men want a license to carry a concealed firearm in public.

WANTING A CHL

While activities like hunting and participation in Boy Scouts socialize men to become gun users and cement the link between firearms and masculinity, this does not explain why some men want to pursue a license to carry a gun in public. In my analysis of interviews with men who have a CHL, I find that becoming a father and a husband are defining moments that push men towards wanting to be armed in public. It is also clear

while many men do not claim to feel vulnerable in their youth, as they age, they begin to feel a need to be armed in self-defense.

Good Fathers, Good Husbands

Defending the family is significant in men's accounts of carrying a concealed firearm. Nearly all of the men I interviewed are married, and ten have children living at home. In almost every case, the men I interviewed explained their gun use as deeply tied to defending their families. Adam, 36, says that he first bought a gun around the age of 21 because having just finished college, he could only afford to live in "lower income neighborhoods where there's more crime and there's more shootings and violence." Adam described that neighborhood as "a bad part of Houston" and said he only used his gun for protection in his home and was never very serious about self-defense. All this changed when he and his wife were expecting a child. He explains his perspective as follows: "I'm the dad. I think my role is that I have to protect my family. That's my number one duty as a dad: to provide…food, shelter, and protection for my wife and my child. I mean that's what being a dad is." I asked Adam if that is a role he is trying to learn or if it's one a man automatically assumes when he gets married. He responded,

> I think you automatically assume it when you get married. And, then especially when you have a kid. And I don't know if that's my belief, or it's just the way I grew up or whatever. But you know, when you get married, you're supposed to do certain things. You know, you have roles. And I know that in today's society [pause] a lot of people like to think well men and women, they're the same and you know, the women work and so do the men and all that stuff. Which, to some extent, I agree. But there's other certain inherent parts of being a man and being a woman that you have certain roles. I can't have a baby! You know, physically I can't have a baby and physically I'm stronger than my wife. And, it's just up to me to protect her, in every situation. And if, you know, if we were ever attacked or accosted or

> something then, then it's up to me to protect her until she can, you know, be safe.

Adam became very animated about what he termed "his role" in his family and seemed exasperated by the suggestion that men and women are equals in all senses. Adam sees his wife and child as dependent upon him for their safety. Rooting his argument in bodily differences makes the distinction seem natural and inevitable (Connell 1995; Hollander 2001).

Like many respondents, Adam says that a gun is a superior tool for self-defense because it doesn't matter if a criminal is larger or stronger than he is; with a gun, he can defend himself. This is what is meant when guns are referred to as "equalizers." Presumably, this logic would also apply to women and would suggest that there is nothing inevitable about Adam, and the other men who made such statements, occupying the role of the family protector. Instead of stemming from a natural consequence of him being "the dad," Adam utilizes discourses that link masculinity to physicality and aggression and femininity to vulnerability (Hollander 2001) to place his wife and children in positions of dependence.

Mark, a very tall and physically imposing man, is 34 and married with two small children. Standing 6 feet 10 inches, his first jobs after college were in personal security. Mark says he never felt particularly vulnerable until he and his wife were expecting their first child. Mark describes developing a deep-seated need to ensure that his family is protected. He says, "You know, I've got a newborn child that is relying on me to not only protect him, but to protect myself and his mother." As his perspective shifted

towards a focus on defending his family, Mark not only obtained a CHL, he also pursued advanced training in handgun self-defense tactics. He now carries a gun everywhere he goes—including the gym and his own home—whether it is legal or not. Like Adam, he suggests that becoming a father was a transitional moment for how he thinks about vulnerability and self-defense. Both men went from only having guns in the home to wanting to carry a gun in public because as fathers, they feel it is their duty to protect their family.

Though Mark says that he carries a gun to protect his family, he also explains that he spends much of his time apart from them. Mark says that he would love for his wife to carry a firearm because, "if something happens to me, you know if I get shot, she can take it and use it. If I'm not there. If she's by herself." He elaborates by saying, "I can't be with [my kids] 24 hours a day. She can't be either, but you know, she's more…likely to be there than I am." In this explanation Mark wants his wife to be armed not because she would also become a family defender, but because he can't always be with his family. Like Mark, many of the other married men I interviewed said that they wish their wives would obtain a CHL, but in contrast to how they see their role as fathers, they don't see their wives as bad mothers because they aren't licensed. Moreover, their wives' refusal to be armed further emphasizes that it is a father's job to protect his family.

When I asked Mark if he is ever stressed about his wife's safety when he is not with her he replied, "No, I mean…she's a good girl. She can take care of herself [laughs]. But you know, it's been in the back of my mind always. You…gotta kinda balance the practicality versus the, the uh [long pause] oh, what's the word? The

paranoia." There is a disconnect between how Mark explains his need for a CHL—because crime can happen to anyone, anywhere—and his general comfort with the fact that his wife does not carry a gun. His contradictory response underscores how, in addition to simply being a tool for self-defense, Mark's possession of a CHL signifies that he is a good father and husband.

Another instance in which the "father as protector" role becomes clear is when men travel and are away from their families. For example, Jeff is 48 and an affable gun enthusiast. He regularly participates in shooting competitions and carries a firearm with him whenever he can. Though Jeff carries his handgun as often as he can, his wife has no interest in firearms. Jeff finds this particularly bothersome when he goes out of town. He describes reminding his wife of the gun safe's combination: "I said, 'you know the combination to the little safe, right? You know where it is? You know how it works? Right?'" When I asked him if he has to convince his wife to think about using a gun if needed, he said, "We had to review. Yeah. She's just [pause] she's not me. Sadly." Jeff makes it clear that his wife would not rely on a firearm for self-defense and he thinks she is being naïve about her vulnerability. Because he knows she will not use a gun, it seems that when Jeff reviews the safe's combination he is doing so for reasons that may have more to do with his attempt to re-affirm his position as defender of the household than with reminding his wife how to access the guns. When his wife rejects his insistence that access to a firearm is necessary, she is also rejecting the construct around which Jeff's "role" is built.

Another example comes from Richard, who is married with two young sons. Richard said that while his wife does not have much interest in guns and has no interest in getting a CHL, she does occasionally resort to reaching for the bedside gun when he is out of town. He explains, "Since I remember it, I occasionally test my wife to make sure she remembers it. Cause I know she gets scared, because I've gone out of town like on a huntin' trip and come back and that gun is sitting on the night stand. I said, 'Why's the gun there?' She goes, 'I thought I heard something.' So she gets the gun out; she knows how to use it; she knows how to get in the safe." Practices some men use such as testing their wives about the gun safe combination, or reminding their wives where the guns are kept, remind them of their vulnerability when their husbands are absent and reify masculine strength.

The men I talked to consider themselves law-abiding, virtuous, and brave defenders of their families—matching the image of the ideal gun-owner perpetrated by the NRA (Connell 1995; Melzer 2009; O'Neill). But paradoxically, having a CHL does not actually enable them to defend their families. In fact, they recognize that their wives are more likely than they are to be in a position to use a gun in defense of the family. This contradiction suggests that while carrying a concealed gun may symbolize their fatherly role, it may not actually translate into an ability to protect their wives and children from harm.

Though they may never be in a position to carry out heroic fantasies of masculine bravery, their concealed handgun suggests to them that they could. By signifying that their wives and children are dependent upon them for protection (whether or not this is

actually true), the men I interviewed are discursively positioning themselves as brave leaders of their families; thus, their CHL is very useful as a symbol that allows men to construct hegemonic masculinity. In many respects, it is an ideal symbol because it signifies to them that they are good fathers and husbands, even when they are away from their wives and children.

The Body and Victimization

The body is central to how masculinity is communicated to others because, "To be fully, appropriately masculine, a male person must exhibit physical control of his space and be able to act on objects and bodies in it" (Crawley, Foley and Shehan 2008, 59). Most of the men who were younger than forty explained that they rarely if ever felt physically threatened. A representative example comes from Mike. When I asked Mike if he had ever felt threatened he said, "Nothing really jumps out at me. I'm probably a little bigger than average. Average height for a male here in America is like 5'9", last time I checked. I'm six foot. I've got a pretty good build. So I think maybe physical appearance might keep some guys away from me that maybe they'd pick on somebody smaller." Mike believes that his body communicates to other men that he is capable of fighting back, and so he assumes that they are not likely to see him as a potential victim.

A second example comes from Steven, 30, who decided to obtain a CHL because of his work as a criminal prosecutor. Early in his career, most of the cases Steven worked on were petty drug crimes. However, Steven first considered obtaining a firearm when his office prosecuted an aggressive and threatening member of a white supremacist gang. Everyone involved with the case was receiving threats, and Steven decided it was

time to look into obtaining a permit to carry a firearm. Under Texas law anyone who works as a judge or prosecutor is able to carry a concealed firearm if a licensed firearm instructor submits a sworn affidavit attesting to their ability to handle a handgun.

Steven, like Mike, has above average height and an athletic build. But unlike Mike, when I asked Steven if he ever felt physically threatened in public, he said that he had. Steven described two separate incidents wherein a man he had prosecuted confronted him in public, and on both occasions he was not carrying his firearm. Steven says that one of the incidents happened when he stopped in at a Wal-Mart on his way home from the gym. He explains that he was in the store, "And I hear, 'what's up fucking DA?' And so, [I] turn around [and] there's this dude who's pissed off and he's a known drug dealer…we had custody of his kids is how he knows me. And uh, last time in court I really tore into him, so he's pissed off at me. And he starts threatening me and asking me if I'm married you know and all this stuff." When I asked Steven if he felt physically threatened, he said "yes," because "It wasn't just a guy by himself, it was multiple guys. And his friends were, I don't know, really quality guys, too." Steven says that even if he had been armed, the man had surprised him and was too close for him to have been able to react. Additionally, Steven was outnumbered.

Steven offered a second reason for why he feels the need to be armed:

> I want to be able to protect my family. Frankly…I know the cops that patrol this area. If somebody's breaking into my home, I want a big dude to show up at my house to protect us. I know the cops that are coming out of the academies now are small girls. And again, I don't mean anything sexist by this, but from a practical perspective, if somebody's breaking into my house, I don't want that five foot four guy rolling up to my house you know…Oh, and there's a lot of

> overweight cops too, it's just, they're not going to be able to protect you, you know?

Bodies are symbols that communicate strength and vulnerability to others. When Steven says that those coming out of the police academy are "small girls" and overweight cops, he suggests that police officers might be unreliable protectors. Thus, he feels the need to take his family's defense into his own hands.

The Aging Body

Few respondents younger than forty said that they needed a gun primarily to defend themselves. However, five of the twelve respondents forty and older explained that age factored into why they have a CHL. Like many respondents, Jeff reports that he cannot carry his gun at work. When I asked him how that makes him feel he replied, "Vulnerable. [laughs]. As I'm being reminded, like today at my orthopedist, trying to get my knee fixed, I'm not as young as I used to be. And [pause] I don't, I don't want to have to dance with somebody if they want to do me violence." Jeff explains that with a gun he does not have this sense of vulnerability and instead feels relaxed knowing he has "a superior ability to deal with a situation harshly if I have to." He then tells the following story:

> Years ago I was practicing martial arts regularly. And a friend of mine at the office…a good friend of mine, was just always real aggressive. And, he had his usual fifteen pots of coffee that day, and got vulgar like he always did, and I think…he said, "I'll kick your ass" or something like that. I just turned around and smiled at him. And he said, "Oh man, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. I was just joking." I said, "I know. I know you were joking, don't worry about it." [laughs]. Then we laughed it off. And he was very visibly shaken. I wasn't gonna do anything to him, but he knew and I knew that I could've. No big deal.

Jeff felt proud that his officemate feared him. Though he is older now, and not able to do martial arts, carrying a firearm gives him the same sense of confidence. Jeff's firearm supplies him with a virility that his aging body has surrendered. He says he feels "calm and relaxed" when he's carrying a gun and that when he's armed, if someone threatens him, he can just smile back, rather than worrying about how to handle the situation. Without having to show his firearm to others, Jeff's gun makes him feel at ease, confident he can handle any confrontation.

Gil, 66 lives in a major metropolitan city in the Southwest. He says he carries a firearm because, "I refuse to be a victim. I refuse to put myself in the position where…someone can exercise that kind of control over me." Gil relayed a story about a time where he felt physically threatened and did not have his firearm with him. He was coming out of a sporting arena in a major metropolitan city. "We were goin' into the parking ramp to get our vehicle. And there were a bunch of [long pause] young [pause] punks." Gil struggled to find the words to describe the group of people he was approaching. "It was pretty uncomfortable for about five minutes, until I was certain that they were goin' somewhere else and not to us." When I asked if the group of people were being hostile towards him, he replied, "Well…let's just say I was uncomfortable." And after a long pause, "I think we've all had that experience in a public place." Because sports arenas are gun-free zones, Gil could not carry his gun and had left it in his car. When I asked him how his behavior would have been different if he had his gun on him, Gil said he would have been more confident. "In what ways?" I asked. He replied,

> Confident in that I can take care of myself. You know, at my age, I'm not gonna win many kung fu fights with an assailant. [laughs] And, you know, 34 years ago if someone wanted to mix it up, I probably would've been okay taking my chances. But you get to a certain age and you've got some problems. You know, dealing on a physical level. And you don't run as fast. [laughs]. You know what I mean?

Gil then said, "You know the old saying, don't piss off an old guy because he'll probably just kill ya? [laughs]." This joke was an abrupt response to the admission that Gil no longer sees himself as physically strong. It seemed intended to convey that though getting older has taken its toll, if provoked, he could still defend himself.

Another example of how firearms can compensate for lost capacities as bodies age comes from Larry, 54. When we met, Larry arrived on a Harley motorcycle and was wearing a black bandana and black leather vest. He had a goatee and was a tall, stout man. Throughout the interview Larry projected a very tough, almost threatening persona. When Larry told me he carried a gun long before he had a CHL, I asked him if that was because he had experienced a violent incident or if it was because of a "generalized fear that something could happen." Larry quickly dismissed the notion that he feared violent crime. Instead, Larry says he's realistic: "Most people have this delusion that the world's this warm happy place, and for most of them, it is. But that's only because nothing's happened to them yet." Similar to the New War ethos Gibson (1994) studied, Larry has constructed a worldview in which there is a perpetual struggle between forces of good and evil. This worldview justifies Larry's tough and aggressive, thoroughly masculine self-presentation. Later in the interview I asked him if he had ever felt physically threatened when he was not armed. Again Larry dismissed the idea that he would feel

threatened. He explains that this is because of his military training in hand-to-hand combat:

> If I've got a stake or a pool cue, I will own your ass. As far as not having anything? When I was a little bit younger and in a little bit better shape, I was comfortable with up to three people. So, no, I didn't particularly feel threatened. If worst gets to worst, I can grab one person, they will scream like a little girl before it's all over with and the other two people will not want to get that close.

In this moment, and in many others during the interview, Larry seemed purposive in communicating to me that being tough and capable of violence are important attributes in a man, and are attributes he has always had. Larry wanted to make it clear to me that he does not feel threatened because he's confident that he can dominate other men. He is both willing to engage in violence and capable of domination, traits deeply tied to masculinity (Messner 1992; Messerschmidt 2000). However, he also admits that growing older has taken a toll on his body. Because he was so quick to dismiss suggestions that he might feel vulnerable or threatened, and because he feels like he can dominate other men without a gun, I asked Larry, "So then why do you carry [a gun]?" He responded, "Because you never know."

Michael Kimmel (1996, 6) has argued, "Manhood is less about the drive for domination and more about the fear of others dominating us, having power or control over us." These interviews suggest that for many men, bodies communicate whether someone is vulnerable or not. Though men like Larry might scoff at the notion that he carries a gun because of fear, he is motivated by a desire to prevent his domination at the hands of another man. For some men, getting older has meant a loss of access to a fundamental aspect of masculinity: the capacity to physically dominate others (Crawley,

Foley and Shehan 2008). Carrying a gun allows them to recoup the sense of dominance that stems from having an ability to fight back. Unlike subordinate men who are unable or unwilling to fight, "real" men are able and ready to defend themselves, a position that allows them to feel dominant. It is striking how elaborate the fantasies of potential domination can be. Larry describes an imaginary fight scene with a group of three men; Gil wishes he were armed when a group of young men, who did not physically threaten him, walked by him in a parking garage; and Jeff uses a gun to essentially recapture a kung-fu warrior fantasy.

Though these men say that their guns are simply tools to prevent victimization, they are also symbols of virility, and thus, carrying one impacts how they see themselves as men. This helps to explain the appeal of concealed firearms for some men: not that they are communicating to others their ability to dominate them, but that they are reassuring themselves that they will "not be a victim." Gil makes this clear when he says, "You know, none of us want to be victims. [It's] not that any of us are cowboys or going out there looking for a fight, but nobody wants to be a victim." Rather than serving as tools of aggression, for these men, having a concealed gun means that they will never have to "scream like a little girl." The gun functions like a totem of masculinity, giving them calm assurance that they can defend themselves against attack—despite their aging bodies.

CONCLUSION

These interviews suggest that guns are associated with masculinity for reasons that go far beyond the reductionist notion that guns are masculine, and thus, men like

guns. Rather than any sort of natural affinity between men and guns, there exists a relationship between firearms and masculinity that is circulated in media and lived out in men's everyday lives. Many of the men I interviewed are first exposed to guns as children through hunting with their fathers. What stands out from these descriptions is how deeply meaningful such experiences are in father – son relationships. These men do not necessarily exclude women from hunting; women seem to simply not be interested in the activity. Nevertheless, the homosocial nature of hunting is one way that firearms are marked as masculine.

Participation in Boys Scouts is another context that shapes the guns-as-masculine association. This happens by framing firearms with discourses that evoke what might be referred to as "mythologized American masculinity." The framing of gun use and masculinity that the BSA is engaged in is very similar to that which the NRA produces, an organization itself committed to discursively linking idealized masculinity and guns (Connell 1995; Melzer 2009; O'Neill 2007). Given this connection, it is not surprising that the NRA is so heavily invested in the Boy Scouts.

In addition to the central place they occupy in traditionally male-centered activities, firearms are marked as masculine when men describe them as "men's toys." While shopping is an activity that is often referred to as feminine, guns are objects that men can take pleasure in consuming and showing off to male friends.

While the analysis above explains why men are more like to be gun users, it does not explain what would compel some of them to want a licensed to carry a gun in public. According to my analysis of interviews with men who have a CHL, men are compelled to

be armed in public to defend their wives and children. Ironically, although men say they need a gun to defend their families, they are often away from their wives and children and thus would be unable to carry out their role of the defender should the need arise. Second, men who say it's their job to defend their families because they are physically stronger than their wives are among the same people who say that guns are needed for self-defense because as "equalizers," they reduce whatever physical differences might exist between a perpetrator of violent crime and themselves. Third, these men say that they wish their wives would be armed (a claim that is not surprising given that the threat of ever-present victimization is precisely what justifies the need for a CHL). These contradictions suggest that concealed handguns function as props for doing masculinity by asserting the "father/husband as protector." The consequence is that it heightens the extent to which women are presumed to be vulnerable, in need of protection by the men in their lives (Hollander 2001). Having a CHL is a material practice that sustains their belief in essential gender differences by enabling men to fantasize about being the defenders of their families.

The men I interviewed also have elaborate fantasies of potential violence at the hands of other men. As they age, some begin to see themselves as less capable of self-defense. Because the body's capacity for aggression and violence is central to what it means to be masculine (Crawley, Foley and Shehan 2008), some older men feel that their masculinity is diminished. According to Kimmel (2010, 120), this gets to the root of men's fear; a fear that others might "unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men." With a concealed handgun, the

capacity for aggression and domination is restored. As Jeff explained, this can boost a man's sense of confidence, as he is able to regain access to the muscular version of masculinity, and the capacity to dominate other, weaker men, that is celebrated in American culture (Gibson 1994; Jeffords 1994).

CHAPTER 3: Women and Guns

Lisa, 44, is a CHL holder and gun rights activist. Though guns play an important role in her life now, she was not raised in a home with firearms. She recalls seeing her grandfather carry a gun on fishing trips, but her family was not a "gun family." Lisa is originally from California, and explains that when her family moved to Texas around the age of five, she quickly became immersed in Texas' gun culture. Unlike California, in Texas, nearly every kid owned a BB gun; most trucks had a rifle on a gun rack; and sleepovers happened at kids' homes where mounted animal trophies hung on the walls. Lisa says that while she was fascinated by firearms, her first opportunity to shoot a gun happened when she was an adult. One day a man she was dating asked if she would like to shoot with him. She explains, "He had property so we just you know, set up a target, and he was like, 'you just need to get comfortable'…And so we started with a .22 and then we would go to the range and work our way up."

Lisa explains that the same boyfriend who taught her how to shoot gave her a gift certificate for a CHL licensing class as a birthday present. The year was 1996, and CHLs had just become available for Texas residents. He told her, "You need to go do this. You need to go protect yourself. I don't want you traveling without it." Lisa recalls that friends of hers laughed at the gift. She says sarcastically, "everyone was like, 'Oh, really romantic!' And I was like, no think about it, it was really romantic! You know, he wanted me to be able to take care of myself…when I was out and about."

It took six months for Lisa to become more familiar with guns, more experienced in shooting, and to decide to go through with getting a CHL. Ultimately, Lisa decided

she wanted to get the license, and "of course, once I got it, I wanted to go shopping." Lisa and her boyfriend went to a gun show and found the gun she eventually named Annie. "She's a Colt 1911, government issued .45. And she's beautiful. She's custom." Lisa talked about "Annie" like a glowing parent. Lisa says, "We were shopping and I fell in love with her, and I just think she's, I mean, very girly, I know, but she's pretty."

Lisa is one of the 461,724 Texas residents who held an active CHL in 2010. Of that total, approximately 90,000 licensees are women. Little is known about how the gendered meanings of firearms shape women's gun use, and even less is known about women's experiences with concealed handgun licensing. In this chapter, I utilize interviews with fifteen women who have a CHL in Texas to better understand how gendered discourses of gun use, victimization, and self-defense shape women's experiences. The following questions frame this analysis: What might explain the gender discrepancy in firearm use? How do the women explain their gun use? Why did they want to get a CHL? Are there any drawbacks or consequences to this form of self-defense?

ARMED WOMEN

There are two literatures that are relevant for a study of women's CHL use: that which focuses on women and guns and that which is concerned with women's self-defense. Within the women's and gun literature there are two areas of focus: one is an attempt to disrupt the link between masculinity and firearms by making women gun users visible (Browder 2006; Homsher 2001; Floyd 2008); the other critically examines the NRA's women-focused marketing strategies (Jones 1994; Homsher 2001; McCaughey

1997; Smith and Smith 1995; Stange and Oyster 2000). Though some feminists vehemently oppose the gun lobby's efforts to encourage women to use guns (Jones 1994), others advocate for women's gun use as a response to violent victimization (McCaughey 1997; Stange and Oyster 2000; Wolf 1995). Some who are opposed to guns organize their anti-gun positions based on ideas around motherhood and the innocence of children (Homsher 2001). These literatures suggest that women's gun use is deeply intertwined with gendered discourses around violence, victimization and vulnerability. As I will argue, these discourses are central to how the women I interviewed make sense of their own firearm use.

Making Gun Women Visible

The first theme in the literature on women and guns attempts to disrupt the idea that guns are "men's things," by highlighting women gun users (Floyd 2008). These texts provide evidence that in the United States women have a long history of gun use (Browder 2006; Floyd 2008), and they suggest an increasing trend towards women's involvement in occupations that require the use of a firearm (Homsher 2001; Stange and Oyster 2000). The primary purpose of these texts is to advocate for a disruption in the equivocation of guns with masculinity by chronicling the history of women's gun use (Floyd 2008) and by sharing stories of the various pleasures women can derive from using guns (Stange and Oyster 2000). The attempt to disrupt the gendered meanings of guns is captured by Stange and Oyster (2000, 44) when they write, "The gun is only the symbol of male power to the extent that we let it be." However, disrupting this association might be more difficult than simply celebrating women who use guns.

Though women in the United States have long used firearms, Laura Browder (2006) argues that the social meaning of these uses has changed over time, and that these changes reveal deep tensions and ambivalences about gender in American culture. While mid-19th Century firearm advertisements regularly featured women shooters, this all but stopped during the 20th Century when guns became more closely linked to masculinity. According to Browder, 20th Century gun women who were visible in American culture, such as famous sharpshooter Annie Oakley, were revered in large part because they crafted normatively feminine personas. Annie Oakley's image was deeply tied to her "lady like appearance" and "a version of pioneer life that was highly genteel" (Browder 2006, 89). By contrast, women who used guns in ways that defied patriarchal gender norms such as female gangsters of the 1930s, created much more hysteria than male gangsters, who though criminal, did not threaten patriarchal gender norms.

During the 1960s and 70s representations of women gun users were mostly tied to leftist political organizations, and were often caricatured in the press as being out of control byproducts of women's liberation (Browder 2006). The 1980s and 1990s ushered in a wave of cultural representations of men wielding guns as a New War ethos emerged in popular culture (Gibson 1993). This ethos celebrated patriotic hyper-masculinity and macho gun violence as a way to recoup lost pride in the wake of the United States' loss in the Vietnam War. During this time the NRA was engaged in producing discourses of an ideal gun user that linked firearms to hegemonic masculinity by stressing a commitment to family values, individual freedom and patriotism (Connell 1995; Melzer 2009; O'Neill 2007).

Though some pro-gun feminists would like to disrupt the link between masculinity and firearms by making women gun users visible and celebrating women who use guns (Floyd 2008; Stange and Oyster 2000), the larger gender and firearms literature suggests that cultural discourses that link guns to masculinity are deeply entrenched in mythologized accounts of Western settlement (Melzer 2009), in popular culture (Gibson 1994) and in politics (Connell 1995). Moreover, there is a long history of interpreting women's gun use in ways that preserve patriarchy instead of challenging it (Browder 2006). In studying women who have a CHL, it is important to understand how their explanations of gun use exist alongside cultural discourses that so insistently links guns with masculinity. How do gender discourses shape the way women with CHLs explain their gun use?

"Refuse to be a Victim?"

The second theme in the literature analyzes how in the midst of this heightened association between gun use and masculinity, the NRA identified women as an under-marketed demographic and developed a campaign to promote women's gun use called "Refuse to be a Victim" (Browder 2006; Smith and Smith 1995; Stange and Oyster 2000). This campaign suggested that women could be empowered by guns (Smith and Smith 1995) and it encouraged women to become gun users by focusing "on a privatized notion of citizenship [and] a refutation of so-called victim politics" (Browder 2006, 229). As part of the campaign, the NRA produced a "Refuse to be a Victim" promotional video (http://www.nrahq.org/rtbav/). The video starts with a scene that is emblematic of the type of public crime women report fearing most: a woman, ostensibly alone at night in a

parking garage senses that someone is lurking nearby. She hears footsteps in the distance. As she tries to get her car unlocked, she drops her keys and hears a person's voice. It turns out that the voice is of a man she knows who is saying goodbye to her and not a potential perpetrator. A woman's voice plays over the scene: "Here's a situation we've all faced before. After work, on campus, and at the shopping mall, but what if it was a dangerous situation? Are we truly prepared?" Refuse to be a Victim courses teach an array of self-defense strategies including the use of firearms.

The NRA was criticized for this campaign because it played on women's fear of crime, implied that women could "choose" to not be victims, and ignored data suggesting that women might be more harmed by guns than protected by them (Blair and Hyatt 1999; Homsher 2001; Stange and Oyster 2000). Additionally, for many anti-gun feminists, promoting women's gun use was akin to encouraging women to be violent, a position some have seen as counter to feminism's aims. Such criticisms were captured by a 1994 *Ms. Magazine* cover that featured a semi-automatic handgun with a title that asked "Is This Power Feminism?" For the magazine's authors, the answer was a resounding, "No!" (Jones, A. 1994).

Though many feminists scoffed at the NRA's "Refuse to be a Victim" campaign, others argued that the NRA was not promoting women's fear, but acknowledging and offering a remedy for it (Stange and Oyster 2000; Wolf 1995). Indeed, while fear of crime is a widespread phenomenon throughout the United States, women fear crime at much higher rates than men (Warr 2000). Fear of crime is linked to a wide array of negative outcomes including high levels of anxiety and restricted mobility in public

spaces (Hale 1996). Because guns are so powerful, they have the potential to erase any physical differences in strength and/or size that might exist between a victim and a perpetrator of violent crime. This is why they are often called "equalizers" by gun advocates. Their ability to "equalize" dynamics of vulnerability and aggression between women and men has led some pro-gun feminist writers to argue that gun use is an avenue for women's empowerment (Stange and Oyster 2000; Wolf 1995).

Paxton Quigley is one of the most vocal and visible proponents of women's gun use. A one-time proponent of gun control, Quigley explains that her views on self-defense changed when a friend of hers was "attacked and viciously raped by a predator" (Paxton Quigley's Blog). Her bestselling book *Armed and Female* is filled with tales of women in harrowing situations who would have been violently attacked were it not for their ability to use a gun for self-defense. On her website Quigley reports that her mission is the following: "If you're a woman, I want to encourage and inspire you to step out of character, abandon age-old bonds of male dependence, and break free from the powerlessness, fear and depression that has [sic] plagued our gender for so long" (Paxton Quigley's Blog).

While "Refuse to be a Victim" focuses on women and encourages women's gun use, an anti-gun organization emerged in the late 1990s that focused on another class of victims: children. Between February 1996 and May 2000 there were sixteen high-profile shootings in the United States in which forty people were killed and 87 people were wounded. The median age of the shooters was fourteen and most of the victims were children (Goss 2006). After watching footage of terrified children fleeing a shooting at a

Jewish Day Care Center in Grenada Hills, California, Donna Dee-Thomases decided she had to become politically involved in gun control legislation. Her strategy was to get mothers involved, some of whom had lost children in shootings, in protesting lax gun laws as a threat to child safety (Newman 2000).

On Mother's Day 2000, nearly 750,000 people, most of whom were women, marched on Washington D.C. (Homsher 2001). Known as the Million Moms March, the organization utilized discourses around motherhood and femininity to push their primary agenda: requiring that handguns be registered with authorities and fitted with childproof locks, and that handgun owners be licensed. The Million Moms March's website tracked lawmakers' positions on gun safety and awarded "Apple Pie Awards" for those who had a strong record of gun safety and "Time Out Chairs" for those who did not (Newman 2000). The primary target of the Million Moms' ire was the NRA, a group that was seen by the organization as irresponsible on the issue of gun safety.

The debates around pro- and anti-gun positions reveal how gender discourses can be deployed to support oppositional causes. While on the one hand the NRA used women's fear of crime to promote gun use and gun manufacturers offered feminized firearms in an attempt to appeal to women, those who were opposed to the NRA and gun use relied on discourses that linked violence to masculinity and promoted motherhood as a way to save children from gun violence. Both pro-gun and anti-gun forces utilized discourses that did little to challenge tenets of patriarchy: women (and children) are victims, and though it may be "unnatural" to take charge of your own defense, you can do it!

Feminist Self-Defense: Undoing Gender?

The "doing gender" perspective argues that gender is accomplished in everyday interactions as men and women are held accountable to others' expectations (West and Zimmerman 1987). This accountability hinges on widely held cultural beliefs about how men and women should behave, and it is enforced by everyone: from peers, to family members; from strangers we meet on the street, to our own self-evaluations. According to the "doing gender" perspective most people try to conform to gender norms because we are stigmatized if we fail to live up to what it means to be a man or woman in society (West and Zimmerman 1987). Crawley, Foley, and Shehan (2008) point to the importance of sexual orientation in the maintenance of patriarchal gender norms. The cultural beliefs that compel women to act in a feminine way are linked to beliefs about heterosexuality. As a result, women are often reluctant to act masculine because they will likely be judged as lesbians (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008). Women, thus, face a double-bind: though characteristics associated with femininity are devalued in our culture, homophobia compels women to embody these characteristics.

"Doing gender" has potentially severe consequences with respect to violence and self-defense for women and men. While "violence is the single most evident marker of manhood" (Kimmel 2010, 121), feminine women are "supposed to be" passive, meek, and soft. Jocelyn Hollander (2001) argues that this translates into women's "perceived vulnerability" and men's "perceived dangerousness." These beliefs are largely tied to beliefs that the average woman is weak, small, and vulnerable to rape whereas the average man is large, strong, and his body is a potential "tool of sexual violence"

(Hollander 2001, 84). The result is that women are often put in the paradoxical position of both fearing men and relying on them for their protection (Hollander 2001). Though violence is sometimes used against women to affirm masculine dominance (Connell 1995), these interviews suggest that *defense* from violence can also be used to reinforce patriarchy. This is what Connell meant when she wrote, "Patriarchal definitions of femininity (dependence, fearfulness) amount to a cultural disarmament that may be quite as effective as the physical kind" (1995, 83). These constructs are buttressed by larger discourses of women's dependency and men's self-reliance (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008).

Importantly, the "passive woman" represents an idealized version of femininity that is cut through with race and class. Black women are subjected to controlling images of black womanhood according to which they are not appropriately feminine because they are "too tough" and unwilling to be reliant on men (Collins 2000). Particularly in underserved, urban areas, black women who are subjected to violence cannot afford to adopt the role of the "passive victim," as using violence is sometimes a necessary strategy for survival (Jones, N. 2010; Miller 2008). The cultural image of the sympathetic victim is most commonly that of a white woman (Madriz 1997).

The debates over the NRA's women's marketing campaign overlap with the various ways that the feminist self-defense movement emerged to counter patriarchal messages that women should be passive in the face of violent victimization (Searles and Berger 1987; McCaughey 1997). Martha McCaughey (1997) argues that women should not wait around for the link between violence and masculinity to change; instead, she

says, women should learn to fight back, to disrupt the presumption that women are inherently vulnerable and physically weak. Whereas patriarchal self-defense programs naturalize women's perceived vulnerability and men's perceived dangerousness (Hollander 2001), feminist self-defense encourages women to reject traits associated with femininity—passivity, reliance on men for defense, and meekness—in favor of using assertiveness, aggressiveness, and strength to defend one's self from attack (Hollander 2004). This paradigm is grounded in evidence that women are often successful at fighting back against violent assault (Ullman 1997).

Though feminist self-defense encourages women to be aggressive as a response to the threat of violent assault, proponents argue that this is not a celebration of violence, but a rejection of victimization (McCaughey 1997). Stange and Oyster (2000, 44) make this claim when they write, "The problem with so much feminist advocacy of nonviolent 'resistance': so long as women are perceived—and *perceive themselves*—as incapable of genuine aggressive action, nonviolence is not a strategy. It is merely the role culturally assigned to women." Feminist authors who advocate using guns for self-defense suggest that armed women fight back against the cultural belief that women have "breakable, takeable bodies" (McCaughey 1997, 36). Though these literatures do not explicitly rely on the theory of "doing gender," they nonetheless evoke its core presumptions and infer that guns allow women a way to "undo gender."

To "undo gender" is to dismantle, or at least alter, the normative expectations that are connected to sex category (Deutsch 2007). Feminist self-defense was developed to do just that by empowering women with strategies to combat both violent victimization

and the patriarchal gender ideologies that reinforce victimization, namely that women are naturally vulnerable to men who are perceived to be naturally aggressive (Hollander 2001; McCaughey 1997; Searles and Berger 1987). Thus, because firearms have the potential to disrupt normative beliefs about how victimization and aggression are gendered, they have the potential to be used by women to undo gender. Yet, this potential hinges on whether patriarchal gender norms shape women's gun use.

HOW IS GUN USE GENDERED?

Though it is difficult to precisely determine the number, an estimated 46 percent of men and 23 percent of women own firearms (Saad 2011). Given such lopsided rates of gun ownership, it might be considered an unremarkable fact that only twenty percent of the nearly one million concealed handgun licenses issued in Texas since 1996 have been issued to women (Texas DPS). However, any analysis of the gendered meanings of concealed handgun licensing, must grapple with a central question: why do so few women own and use guns? According to one study, exposure to guns as children predicts gun ownership as adults more than any other variable (Cook and Ludwig 1997). Given the lopsided figures of gun ownership between men and women, this would suggest that women are not socialized to use guns as children. Though interviews with women who have CHLs cannot explain why fewer women own guns than men, they will shed light on the gender dynamics that frame women's gun use.

Becoming a Gun User

Twelve of the fifteen women interviewed for this study were reared in homes where guns were present. Nearly all of these women were exposed to guns as children,

though some had much more extensive experience with shooting than others. While the men I interviewed were either taught to shoot by their fathers, through participation in Boy Scouts or the military (some had all three experiences), the women in this study had far fewer institutionalized opportunities to learn to shoot. Nevertheless, most report they first became familiar with guns as kids.

Ruth 53, is the only respondent who was not taught to shoot as a child despite having a father who owned guns. She says, "He never showed them to me, never did anything…" In an attempt to explain his reasoning, Ruth says, "I guess, since I was…an only child [and] since I was a girl, my dad never really talked to me about [them]." Though she is not sure why her father failed to teach her how to shoot guns, there is evidence to suggest that he thought of guns as men's things. She says, "When I grew up and got married and had sons and he was getting old, he gave [a gun] to them."

Unlike Ruth, most of the women interviewed had some familiarity with guns as kids, even if only with BB guns. However, most women received a variety of messages throughout their lives that guns were the purview of men. The primary way that guns were marked as men's objects was that respondents almost always talked about their childhood household gun(s) belonging to their fathers. Their mothers rarely—and in many cases never—used guns. And it was not just their fathers' guns that were in the home. Like in Ruth's family, it was common for respondents to explain that guns are often passed down from fathers to sons or grandfathers to grandsons. For example when asked when she first remembered seeing a gun, Krysti, 37, says, "Oh, goodness; I don't

remember not seeing guns." She said her father had a wide variety of guns, some of which "were passed down from his father to him and from his father's father to him."

Hunting is one of the primary contexts in which people are socialized to use guns, and those I interviewed suggest that it is a predominantly male endeavor. Jackie, 53, is among the women who did not grow-up with guns. She explains that her paternal grandfather moved from Sicily to the outskirts of Pittsburg and that according to her family, the only people who have guns are either the "mafioso" or the police. She explains, "Good guys didn't have guns. Cops had guns and bad guys had guns, and that was it. So, my dad…didn't consider the possibility that having a gun could be a good thing." Jackie says that the first time she saw a gun was when she was invited on a hunting trip with her college boyfriend's family. She says that experience was her first introduction to "macho" gun use, as the men on the trip were the only ones who handled the firearms. She says that the attitude was, "Oh you don't have to handle them. It will be okay. We'll take care of them for you." Similar sentiments shaped her next experience with guns. At the age of 23 Jackie married her first husband, a man who sometimes hunted and owned a few guns. She says though she had a "mild interest" in learning to shoot, hunting and target practice were her husband's activities, not hers. Jackie explains, "You know, the women stayed in the kitchen and the guys went out and shot the guns. It was a very chauvinistic kind of arrangement."

It was rare for the women I interviewed to describe the gun-using men in their lives as chauvinistic; however, it was very common for both the women and men that I interviewed to take for granted the notion that guns are predominantly used by men. For

example, Molly, 36, explains that she and her sisters (one of whom was also interviewed for this project), "have always been raised around guns." She says that as a kid, "I would join my dad bird hunting [though] I wouldn't actually shoot…during those times. I didn't ever like the loud noises and the guns really scared me. But I would go with my dad and my uncles while they hunted…" When I asked if her mom ever hunted she said, "I don't remember her with a shotgun. But she was out with us…We'd all go together. But I don't know that I specifically remember her with a shotgun shooting doves and birds and stuff." While many of the men I interviewed hunted with their fathers when they were young and then became hunters as teens and adults, this was far less common for the women.

The one exception is Caroline, who is 67 and lives outside of Houston. Her father is a retired Air Force Colonel, and the self-described "military brat," moved regularly as a child. When asked if she remembers the first time she ever saw a gun Caroline says, "I can't ever remember a time that we didn't have guns in the home." She recalls hunting with a gun when she was very young and learning to shoot a shotgun around the age of six or seven. Caroline's story of learning to shoot is much like those relayed by some of the men I interviewed: the gun was so strong and she was so small that it knocked her over. I asked if the experience scared her and she replied, "No. Dad said, it will probably knock you down, and it did. So, [I] got up, dusted off, and tried it again."

Though Caroline remembers that it was her father who taught her to use a gun, both of her parents were capable shooters. Caroline relayed the following story describing her mother's shooting abilities:

> We went to Germany right after the war…it was a very dangerous place to be for Americans. My dad was provost martial, and we had a home and everyone [near us] was robbed. And my mother could shoot from the hip better than anybody I ever knew. The maid would hold up a bamboo pole and touch cherries and mother would quick draw and shoot the cherries off the tree. And the Germans lined up around and watched [my mother] shoot and we were never robbed.

When Caroline and her family lived in Wyoming, her mother was a hunting guide. The whole family hunted prong horns, moose, deer, bears, and elk (an animal that Caroline said were too beautiful for her to shoot). Caroline says that she used to hunt deer, but "we don't eat that much red meat anymore and I just can't imagine why I would kill something I wasn't going to eat."

Like Caroline, both of Catherine's parents regularly shot guns, though neither of them hunted. She was given a BB gun around the age of seven and between the ages of 11 and 14 she participated in shooting accuracy competitions. When I asked Catherine who taught her to shoot she explained, "My dad, my grandfathers, my mom…" "She was into shooting too?" I asked. "Yeah, I mean everybody. [Not] my grandmothers, neither of them, they were both terrified of guns. But my mom and dad were both really into it." Catherine's example illustrates that even when women and their mothers used guns, this happened in contexts in which women's gun use was uncommon. Unlike Catherine and Caroline, typically when respondents reported that their moms used guns it was a tacked-on comment, suggesting that the experience was rare. For example, Mary said that there

were rifles and shotguns in her home when she was a child and that they belonged to her father. When I asked if her mother ever shot the guns she said, "She has shot, yes."

When women explain how they learned to shoot, most recall being taught by their fathers as children. However, because most women did not use guns during adolescence, they also tell stories about having to relearn to shoot as adults. Nearly all of these stories involve women learning how to use guns from husbands or boyfriends. For example, Molly says that she and her husband would go to his friend's ranch and that "the guys would go hunting and, you know, girlfriends were welcome. And we would target practice…with handguns…when they were done or whatever. [My husband] had a gun and I hadn't shot much…so he decided it was time to start showing me."

The above stories indicate that guns are primarily used by men. Though most women made no mention of the significance of guns being marked as "men's things," it is the context in which the larger gendered meanings of guns should be understood. This is particularly true to the extent that it operated as a common sense, background assumption that frames how people interpret gun use. The men and women interviewed for this study suggest that while men are more likely to use guns and to have experience with them, in the interest of safety, both men and women should know how to appropriately handle firearms. However, given the notion that guns are men's thing, it is not surprising that some women are initially reluctant to shoot firearms.

Respondents' explanations of gun use contain cues, often subtle, that suggest men are "natural" gun owners while women are not. For example, when I asked Krysti if her mom uses guns, she explained, "No. But we want to get her out there…because my dad

travels a lot and she's home by herself. I would just like her to be able to, if she had to, be able to use it…I don't think she has the confidence." When I asked her if she thought her mom might come around to the idea she said, "I think with the prodding of me and my dad getting her to finally just get out there. Just saying, so you're getting in the car and we're going to the range today. You know, after you get your hair done. [Laughs]." Such nonchalant explanations of gun use as a gendered practice were embedded in nearly every interview.

Paradoxically, the construction of gun use as masculine was reinforced even by those women who work to encourage women's gun use. I first encountered this sentiment from Susan, a CHL instructor who owns a firearms instruction and concealed handgun licensing school with her husband. Susan told me a story about a woman whose husband had tried to get his wife to learn how to shoot his firearms, but she simply refused to go with him. One of the times that she was working at a gun show, the man brought his wife by Susan's table under the pretenses of looking at a shirt he thought she might like. Susan explains that the conversation they had convinced the woman to try out a pistol class. Susan says, "She was very reluctant to come." Ultimately, the woman took multiple shooting courses, became a CHL holder and now, "She's all about her guns." Slowly drawing out her words for emphasis, Susan explains, "She under-stands it now."

According to Susan, it is common for women to be unwilling to learn how to shoot guns for self-defense. She explains, "Yeah, I get a lot of ladies that, (in a high pitched voice), "Oh, I'm afraid of guns" or "I don't know anything about guns." Given

the mocking tone Susan used to explain such views, it was clear that she finds this perspective contemptible. She explains why women react in such a way as follows: "They think that it's a gender thing that guns are for men and that women who do carry guns are you know…overly butch or, you know, whatever." Though Susan clearly does not agree with the notion that women gun users are "overly butch," her observation that some women think that women's gun use is masculinizing is a part of the larger picture that shapes the gendered meanings of firearm use.

This sentiment was reinforced by Lisa, whose experiences opened the chapter. She says that some people seem shocked when they find out that she carries a concealed firearm. She likes that she might "take the stigma off" or challenge "stereotypes" others may have about CHL holders. She says, "I mean, not that I don't wear my boots, not that I, you know, can't get down and dirty just as anybody else. But I mean, look at me. I've got cute little flip flops on you know. I'm a girl!" On a basic level, such ideas are likely the driving force behind the reality that women's guns and accessories are often available in pink. More significantly, such ideas and beliefs about gender likely frame how women relate to guns and how they make decisions about obtaining a CHL.

Illustration C: A Smith and Wesson .38 J-Frame Revolver. It is common for gun store clerks to suggest this type of handgun for women. Though the standard grips are black, pink is an option.

Scary Guns and Doing Gender

In addition to the reality that guns are often marked as "men's things," there is an added layer that impacts the gendered meanings of firearms: they are intimidating. This is not to suggest that men are more likely to use guns because they are less likely to be intimidated; instead, it is important to analyze how gender frames the ways men and women explain their emotional reactions to learning to shoot guns. Because this sample consists of gun owners, people who are comfortable enough with firearms to own one (or more) guns, it is not surprising that few respondents explained that they found guns intimidating. Nevertheless, a small number of men and women interviewed for this project explained that learning to shoot handguns was an anxiety-inducing experience, and the differences in how they explained their emotions is an important component in understanding how gender shapes firearm use.

For example, one respondent who had a strong emotional reaction to learning how to shoot a handgun was Allison, 35. Allison, who was not raised in a home with guns, decided to learn how to shoot when she started dating Catherine (also interviewed for this study) who owned guns and who had a CHL. She felt that since Catherine carried a firearm regularly, it would behoove her to know how to use a gun. Allison says that the first time she shot a gun was "Probably about two years ago. And I had never shot one before. In fact, the first time I actually shot it, I had tears running down my face." When I asked her what had caused that reaction, Allison replied, "I think it was overwhelming. I think it was frightening. I think it was unfamiliar, and I think it was just a combination of all those that really just kind of freaked me out for a second. You know, I think I just have always had a fear of firearms. I don't know why. I can't even rationalize it. I think it's just the power of it. I think it's like the first time you get behind the wheel of a car, you know, most of us recognize the magnitude of what we're about to do. About the possible repercussions associated with it."

Rachel 41, had a similarly strong reaction the first time she learned to shoot a handgun. Though she had grown-up in a home with guns and had shot BB guns and air rifles as a kid, Rachel first shot a firearm around the age of 35. Rachel and her husband, a former "military man" who was a member of Special Forces, had moved to a house in a rural area. Her husband felt it was important that she learn how to shoot because of the wildlife in the area and because, "he travels quite a bit and he wanted me to be able to protect myself." In describing what it was like the first time she fired a handgun, Rachel says, "I thought, 'My God these things are so loud. Why do people like this?' And that

was with the all the hearing protection I could have. I do the double thing, the things that go in the ears and the big old muffin things that go over the ears. And I thought, 'Phew! This is terrible!'"

Rachel and Allison's descriptions of learning to shoot handguns should not be read as evidence that women are unlikely to enjoy shooting guns because they are scary and loud. Instead, it is important to consider how feelings about firearms are shaped by cultural beliefs about gender including what emotions are permissible for men and women to express. Allison and Rachel were both intimidated by guns, and initially did not enjoy shooting. Over time, and with a lot of practice, both women became more comfortable with handguns, and each now has a CHL.

In contrast, consider the example of Mike, 36, who first contemplated getting a handgun for self-defense after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Mike says, "I was always a long gun guy. Matter of fact, I was always just a hunting guy." He says he saw no use in handguns or semi-automatic rifles (commonly referred to as "assault rifles"). But after 9/11 Mike decided he wanted a handgun, and so he bought a Glock off of a friend who said he never shot it anymore and had no use for it. Knowing nothing about handguns, Mike asked a friend with handgun experience to show him how to use his new firearm. In the following passage, Mike describes how uncomfortable the experience of learning to fire a handgun was:

> So we [shot] and I sucked! I was nervous. It was so strange because I grew up around guns. I've had a gun in my hand since I was six, you know? You put a handgun in my hand and you get…I got [pause] jittery! There's just something about, there's this stigma about handguns: "Ooh they're dangerous! They'll kill you!" You know? So I was really…trying to figure out how this thing

> works. And to a certain extent, that's good. Because that kind of a [pause] nervous energy? Keeps you aware, you know. As I've gotten more experienced in handguns, I would not say that I've gotten lax in the safety. But I don't have that same nervousness about it. I know this thing can kill you. And I still have a respect for it. But not the same as I did before.

Like Allison and Rachel, Mike's lack of familiarity with handguns meant that he was anxious about the experience of learning to shoot. Throughout our interview Mike was very talkative and even bordered on emotional at times; for example, his eyes misted over when he recalled his feelings on 9/11 and his memories of his deceased father. There was nothing about my interview with Mike that would suggest that he was overly concerned with appearing masculine. But what is interesting, and what speaks to the larger gendered meanings that frame firearm use, is the differences in how he relays his anxiety about firearms. Though his experience parallels Rachel and Allison's, he sums up his anxiety around learning to shoot a handgun as follows, "Cause I hate seeing stories about people who were sitting there, just cleaning their guns, and they take a round in the forehead and they're gone. Cause that's just dumb. And I don't wanna [pause]. I don't wanna die being dumb, you know?" Whereas Allison and Rachel explain their anxiety as rooted in the power of the gun, Mike sums up his reaction in a quintessentially masculine way: accidentally shooting himself in the head would be a humiliating, and final, display of incompetency.

GUNS AS EMPOWERING

Though some women are initially intimidated by firearms, nearly every woman interviewed for this study agreed on one thing: guns are empowering. Women describe guns as empowering in three ways: 1) because guns are marked as men's things, they are

often proud of their abilities to shoot; 2) because guns are "equalizers" that reduce the significance of body size between men and women they make women feel less victimizable; and 3) for those women who have been victimized, guns can restore their feelings of diminished personal strength. In the following sections, I will examine the ways in which women explain their gun use as empowering and will offer a feminist critique of empowerment discourse.

The Joy of Shooting

As was explained above, cultural discourses associate firearms with men. As a result, those women who are competent shooters often take great pride in their abilities. For example, Molly, who was taught to shoot by her husband on a hunting trip, says that learning to shoot was, "very empowering. I didn't think that I would be good at it. And I actually out-shot my husband that day. And so I [thought], 'Wow! Hey I can do this! I can control a handgun and not be quite as intimidated.'" This was a common sentiment among the women I interviewed, many of whom were surprised by how capable they were as shooters and by how much they enjoyed shooting guns.

Lisa did not seem surprised that she was a good shot, but she does describe the fun she had in becoming a proficient shooter. She explains,

> Once I picked up a gun and shot, I was hooked. I mean, the first time I put that .22 in my hand and he was like, 'See if you can hit that target.' And it was the challenge. And I was like, 'I'll show you I can hit that target. And where else do you want me to hit it?!' You know? And so for me, it was very much a challenge of being able to master the gun, if you will. Master the sight, the direction, knowing, being in control of placing that bullet and being in control of the gun.

Lisa later admitted that part of the appeal was the fact that learning to shoot and obtaining a CHL makes her different than other types of women. She says, "And then there was just a little bit of the ego; hey, I'm a girl, and I carry [a gun], you bet!"

Mary, 53, received extensive handgun training as a member of the California Highway Patrol (CHP). Mary retired from the CHP after one year, then went on to another career, and is now a professional competitive shooter. When I asked Mary to describe what it was like to learn how to shoot she said, "It was very empowering and a lot of fun. It was something that I did well. I enjoyed doing. I had excellent instruction, and so it was, it was empowering." Mary compared learning to shoot to learning how to drive a car. She says, "Any time you take any piece of machinery and…you learn to use it properly…it gives you a sense of accomplishment." Though Mary's explanation of learning to shoot is not overtly about gender, the sense of accomplishment she feels is likely tied to the fact others may not have expected her to master firearms. Mary clearly enjoys defying others' expectations. When she explained why she was drawn to law enforcement she said, "Because I could. And people didn't think I could because I'm a small woman. And it interests me; I like law enforcement anyway. And I could, and I did and I set the height minimum. They can't claim that they can't hire anybody who's not five foot or taller because I made it." She was clearly very proud of her trailblazing legacy.

Unlike the men, the women I interviewed often took great pride in their shooting abilities, and this was experienced as a form of empowerment. I argue that this is a response to larger cultural constructions of gender that lead most women to believe that

they are unlikely to be good at things that are marked as men's activities. In contrast, the men I interviewed seem to assume that they are supposed to be able shooters; that they are supposed to have the technical knowhow to competently handle firearms; and thus, they were unlikely to explain their early gun uses in the same ways women do. Paradoxically, this construct has a unique consequence: women are often considered better shooters than men. This is a common sentiment that I heard both in the firearms courses I attended for this project, and in interviews with CHL instructors. When I asked those who made this claim to explain why this is the case, they reported that men often assume that they know what they are doing with a firearm even when they do not, while women listen to instruction.

Guns as an Equalizer

An additional way that guns are described as empowering is when women say that firearms mitigate the size advantage that men typically have over women. Mary succinctly explains this view when she says, "Guns are empowering, especially handguns because they give you the means to put everybody on a level playing field. It doesn't matter if there's a six foot two guy who weighs two hundred and plus pounds coming at me or whether it's a five foot one scrawny kid coming at me. With a firearm, and I can use it appropriately, I am equal to them in size if I needed to defend myself." Later Mary said that she rarely finds herself in situations where she feels threatened because, "If there's one thing I'm good at, I'm really good at intimidating people." I certainly found this to be true. As I mentioned in the introduction, Mary was cautious about our interview, unsure whether I harbored anti-gun sentiments and was conducting this

research in an attempt to discredit CHLs. Her strategy for determining "my agenda" was to be overtly intimidating, terse, and forceful early in the interview. Later she acknowledged that she was "screening" me to determine whether or not she felt comfortable passing my contact information on to her extensive network of CHL holders.

Despite her capacity to intimidate others, Mary acknowledged that without a firearm, she would still be at risk of physical harm. She says, "I'm a small woman, I don't have the strength. I don't have the size. Even if I had a lot of strength, I don't have the size to do battle. Although I can take down a six foot guy with my bare hands, it's not a problem, I can do that. But I would probably get hurt in the process. And those things being all considered, it's so much nicer to have other means to fall back on, other things that you can do." Whether Mary would be able to "take down" a six foot tall man is unclear. What is clear is that with a handgun she does not have to consider whether she is weaker than a potential assailant. Her firearm makes any physical differences between herself and others irrelevant.

According to the women I interviewed, the impact of having an "equalizer" means that women are able to go places and do things that they may have felt restricted from because as women, they were more vulnerable to potential victimization. June, a 67 year-old widow, often takes long distance trips to visit her grandchildren out of state. She says she always carries a gun on those trips; they are the primary reason she has a CHL. Likewise, Lisa says that she has had several jobs that require that she drive long distances. She says, "Driving to and from Austin or to and from Dallas, there have been times where I have…gotten tired, so I will pull off to a rest stop. You know, turn off the

car, put it in park, lay my seat back, but Annie's in my lap, in her case, with the case open. And I'm totally comfortable taking my twenty minute cat nap so I can get back on the road safely." Lisa says that this ability to do things she may otherwise not is "hugely empowering."

The notion that women are vulnerable to male aggression is pervasive in our culture (Hollander 2001). This sentiment is tied to ideas about women's bodies as weak and as objects of male desire. When women carry firearms they carry with them the capacity to forcefully respond to potential victimization, and thus, they may mitigate the sense of perpetual vulnerability that women are socialized to feel from a very young age. While every woman I interviewed explain that guns reduce feelings of vulnerability, this was most poignant for those women who had experienced victimization.

Carrying a Gun after Victimization

For the majority of the people I interviewed for this project carrying a concealed handgun is a self-defense strategy that is to be relied upon only under dire circumstances. It is protection against a hypothetical event. Not for Caroline and Catherine. Both women carry concealed firearms because they have experienced victimization. Caroline is the woman first introduced earlier in the chapter whose father was in the Air Force. She is now 67 and lives in the outskirts of Houston. With a warm and stately manner, Caroline welcomed me into her home for our interview. She even invited me to use her guest room rather than drive an hour back to my hotel.

Caroline says that her first personal protection gun was a .38 which she bought when she was 25 and living in Washington D.C. I asked Caroline if that was for use in

the home. With a matter-of-fact directness, she said, "I was abducted and raped and I had a gun after that." I was stunned by her frankness and said, "I can't imagine how life changing that experience would be." She explains, "Big change. But I was very cautious. You know, I recovered, they offered nothing back then for you. I did work with the police to attempt to catch the guy and…[pause] I just always had a gun after that." Caroline never again went without a gun, despite the fact that it was a criminal offense in Washington D.C. I asked Caroline if prior to that experience she had ever thought about self-defense. She said, "I lived in Wyoming and Idaho, kind of a simple [life]. We lived out on the ranch for a while or on a military base. I don't think there was danger. You know there was no concept of danger there. But you go into Washington and Virginia, there's a real concept of danger."

Throughout our interview it became clear that Caroline had always seen herself as a strong woman. Though the trauma of rape could have made her decide she was more vulnerable than she had previously thought, with a gun in her purse, Caroline's sense of strength and capacity to respond to attack were restored. Caroline recalled a story about a time she was heading into Washington D.C. for a party: "I was dressed for a party in a silk dress had long blonde hair down the middle of my back." As she walked down the street in three inch high heels, she saw a man try to steal an older woman's purse. She was "a little old lady, and she was probably my age now [Laughs]. But to me, she was a million years old." The man did not simply take the woman's purse, Caroline says he pushed the woman down and "stomped her" with his foot. She then describes what happened next, "I chased that sucker six blocks in full high heels and caught him and

arrested him." After I had turned off my tape recorder, she repeated this story and said the man told her he knew she wasn't going to shoot him. She told him, "I'll shoot one ball off at a time and you'll probably bleed to death before the cops get here." But Caroline did not shoot the man. Instead, she held him at gun point until the police arrived. The judge decided not to charge her with a weapons crime, and in fact gave her his business card in the event that she ever needed help with a gun possession charge. A year later she was stopped by police while driving, her gun was found, and the judge's card helped her avoid a weapon's crime. These events are clearly very meaningful to how Caroline saw herself when she was younger. Though she was unable to fight off the man who raped her, she was able to fight back against another woman's attacker and she credits this to being empowered by her firearm.

Caroline first decided to get a CHL a few years ago when she was experiencing a long recovery from broken bones in her leg that had required surgery. She also has arthritis that is so severe, she's had to have surgery to straighten her hands. Caroline describes herself as "slightly crippled." During the rehabilitation of her leg, Caroline was dependent on others' help for quite some time and was not able to leave the house by herself. Caroline describes the first time she was able to leave the house by herself. "This was my first excursion out by myself. I was so thrilled to be out!" She decided to go to her local mall. When she entered the doors of the mall there was a "Mexican gang at the door and I heard a very strange whistle. And I thought 'oops.' And I got to the door and they were kind of circling. And the whistle was to point me out. And so I spent hours in the mall. And when I came to the door, there was the whistle and every head

turned of that group. And then I realize: I have no control over this." She elaborates, "I knew that whistle was about me, instantly. [I] turned around and of course there stands a whole gang." Caroline found a police officer to help her out to her car. It was shortly after that experience that Caroline decided to become licensed to carry a concealed handgun. It seems clear from her description, that race is central to how Caroline determined she was threatened (more on this in chapter five).

In the previous chapter, I argued that as men age and their bodies change, they begin to see themselves as vulnerable. This is particularly salient for men who in their youth valued strength and an ability to fight. Caroline's description of being aware of her vulnerability is very similar. She says, "You know, as I've gotten older, like I ran somebody down six blocks [laughs] when I was young; I was a pretty strong gal. I'm not that way anymore…I couldn't run a mouse down much less a thief! And…I'm fully aware of that." I asked Caroline if her awareness of the difference between her youthful strength and what she sees as her present vulnerability compels her to want to carry a gun. She said, "Absolutely! But I carried when I was young. So, who knows."

Caroline's example provides evidence that there is nothing inevitable about the relationship between gender norms and self-concept. Raised on farms and in the outdoors and having parents who were both shooters—including a mother who she proudly saw as intimidating to potential criminals—seemed to shape Caroline into a woman who did not feel vulnerable. She saw herself as strong and capable of defending herself. Though Caroline did not hold herself to patriarchal norms of femininity that would suggest she was weak and vulnerable, the man who chose her as a target to

sexually assault evidently thought otherwise. Caroline was made into a victim, though she had never seen herself as one before. She says that it took time for her to recover emotionally, but she eventually did. And it seems that carrying a firearm was a central component that allowed her to recover her sense of self. She truly did "refuse to be a victim."

Later in our interview Caroline and I discussed her plans for home safety. There was a time that she always had a gun readily accessible in her home. She decided to change that plan because "It felt like it made me nervous all the time. I couldn't relax. I felt like I needed a safe zone. And so I choose my house to be my safe zone. And if it's not, well that's just life." She contrasts this view with a friend of hers who is always armed with multiple guns. Caroline laughed heartily as she described her friend: "she's a woman about my age and at least 75 pounds overweight and 5'2" and she is sure the whole world is out to rape her. I told her, that at our age, we came off the high risk list!" Then Caroline explained, "I know that I am not being stalked by everybody in the world [laughs]. And I like that feeling. But I do like the feeling that I might have some control. And so that's the reason I got the CHL." In this moment Caroline identifies the main difference between how men and women experience aging: women perceive that they are less likely to be seen as objects of sexual violence—they have "come off the high risk list"—while men feel like they are no longer able to physically dominate other men.

While Caroline's experiences with victimization led her directly to get her CHL, the other woman I interviewed who had experience with victimization took some time to come to that conclusion. Catherine, a white woman in her mid-thirties, is a high school

teacher in an urban area. She grew up in a rural area surrounding a medium-sized city in Texas. All of Catherine's family members participated in shooting and her grandparents even owned their own shooting range. She started shooting BB guns around age seven and says that between the ages of eleven and fourteen she participated in competitive shooting with .22 pistols. Catherine stopped shooting guns regularly when she went off to college and lived in a dorm. When she moved off campus, it was with friends whom Catherine describes as liberal and very anti-gun.

Eventually Catherine's anti-gun friend moved out and she mulled the idea of having a gun in the home. She says she talked about it with her parents, but never actually acquired a gun. Shortly thereafter Catherine bought a home that was in need of some major repairs. While her home was being renovated, the contractor she had hired got into significant legal trouble, tied in part to his attempts to cash his clients' checks at check cashing businesses, a practice that Catherine says is illegal. She put a hold on the check she had given him and soon there were "thuggish guys showing up at my house demanding money. When I'd leave my house people would follow me." At one point, "he dropped nine guys off on my lawn…and told them that I was the reason that they weren't getting paid. And that they should…get paid however they saw fit." Luckily, Catherine was having a party at the time and her guests outnumbered the men. She also says, "the dog wasn't about to have anybody strange on the lawn," and she scared them off. Events like this one left Catherine emotionally strained. She says she did not sleep well for months.

In addition to threatening her with sexual violence and stalking her, the contractor did an estimated $67,000 worth of damage to her home. Though she still owns the property, she cannot afford to fix it and it remains uninhabitable. Catherine says she that the expense of having a mortgage on a house she cannot live in has left her "flat broke." The financial strains of the situation pushed Catherine and her girlfriend to contemplate living together. During this time Catherine was also trying to determine if she wanted to have a gun for personal protection. She says, "I wanted to have one for a long time in that experience, but I still didn't really know what to do. I was so lost. I was so used to not having one, and I didn't own one. I don't know. I didn't think that I could shoot somebody, so I figured it was useless." Ultimately, Catherine decided to obtain a license.

Catherine's experience with victimization has left her forever changed, an impact that she says even friends and family notice. Though she was initially uncertain about whether she wanted to carry a gun, she is very clear on the sense of empowerment carrying a firearm has given her. She says that when she was being stalked and harassed she was panicked and anxious; she didn't feel safe, and "All situations [were] more frightening." In contrast, "I feel much more comforted knowing that I'm armed when I go places, because if nothing else, I have a way out."

Like other forms of self-defense, these interviews suggest that CHLs have the potential to reduce feelings of helplessness and increase feelings of empowerment (Hollander 2004). For Catherine and Caroline, having a handgun allows them to reclaim the sense of self they had prior to being victimized. Before they were victimized, both of these women saw themselves as strong and capable of self-defense. Both described their

experiences of victimization as fundamentally upending their self-perceptions, and only in carrying a handgun, were they able to reclaim that sense of strength.

ARMED WOMEN: FAMILY DEFENDERS?

While three of the women interviewed for this study are single, nine are married heterosexuals, and three are partnered lesbians. As was true for the men discussed in the previous chapter, relationship status plays an important role in how women explain their concealed firearm use; however, relationship status functions very differently for women than it does for men. Whereas sixteen of the eighteen married men I interviewed had wives who did not have a CHL, only two of the women in this sample had a CHL when their husband's did not. In the previous chapter, I argued that men utilize their CHLs to enact the role of the family protector because it allows them to produce hegemonic masculinity. In the following section I ask how women relate to the family protector role and analyze the ways in which gender shapes this process. My analysis suggests that women rarely, indeed almost never, see themselves as responsible for the role of the family protector. This dynamic is most clearly revealed when women explain their gun carrying practices.

For those women whose husbands have a CHL, gun carrying practices seem to largely be affected by their feelings about whether their husbands are armed. This was true for Molly, who said that she likes to have a gun when she drives long distances, especially when her children are with her. She explains, "I have more of a mama bear protecting her cubs feeling. Not that I've ever had a bad experience." Such explanations were common for the four women in my sample who have children living at home.

However, Molly says that if her husband is carrying his gun, "I don't mind not having mine. Again, when we have the kids, I do feel better when I know that one of us has a gun." Though they do not have a formal arrangement about who will be armed when they travel, Molly says that her husband carries more regularly than she does. She also identifies traveling without her husband as her primary motive for having a CHL.

Another example of how gender dynamics shape gun carrying practices is evident in my interview with Wendy, 50. Wendy and I had arranged to meet at a coffee shop on a Friday evening. She arrived with her husband Matt, 46, and asked if it would be okay if he sat with us during the interview. The couple had contemplated getting CHLs since moving from California to Texas in 2004, but it was not a financial priority until the 2008 election when they both felt that gun rights were threatened by the election of Barack Obama.

Wendy, who grew up in the Houston area, says that she has always had a great deal of situational awareness about crime and victimization, "I've always been that kind of person. So, it was nice to be able to take advantage of the legalities and…and getting the handgun [was] the next step." Though she is very comfortable with her handgun and reportedly enjoyed learning about self-defense in her CHL course, she admits that she does not carry her firearm regularly. Wendy says, "Do I always carry? Not always and you know, I've come under fire from the ones that say you know, 'carry 24/7 or guess right.' You know, maybe I'm not guessing right sometimes. But sometimes I just don't. I don't feel like I'm in a situation where I would need it. I think I've always been more

worried about defense at home, than defense out." Then Wendy looked at Matt and said, "And I very seldom go anywhere without you. I don't know how that works? [Laughs]."

Later in our interview Wendy said that she typically feels safe in the city that she lives in and does not regularly carry her gun in public. "I didn't until they had an attack at Wal-Mart about a mile from my building at 1:00 in the afternoon. And that's made me kind of re-think my security a little bit." She says that now, "I probably carry more often out than I did. Especially if I'm going to be by myself. Not so much when I'm with [Matt], and I don't know why that it is. I don't know if it's 'the man will protect me' kind of thing or what [Laughs]." Wendy seemed somewhat embarrassed when admitting that she inconsistently carries a firearm and that she relies on Matt for her defense. Later, when our discussion turned to home defense, the couple explained that should they have a break-in while they are in their bedroom, Wendy will call 911 and Matt will investigate the situation. Thus, both inside and outside of their home, Wendy sees Matt, and Matt sees himself, as the primary defender of the family.

Like Wendy, Susan also relies on her husband to take on the role of the family defender. When I asked Susan if there are any places where she is able to relax and let down her guard she said

> I do that more so when I'm with my husband. Because I know that he's always thinking of it, more so than when I'm thinking of it. So like when I'm on my own, sometimes I'll forget, but I find myself being more aware of where I'm at. But when I'm with my husband I do let my guard down because I know that he's thinking about it for both of us. So I'm a little bit more relaxed in that sense.

Because they both carry guns and both are trained in self-defense, I asked Susan if she ever is in charge of being on guard, so that her husband can relax. She says no, "That's just who he is."

As was mentioned, most of the men I interviewed are married to women who do not have a CHL. As I argued in the previous chapter, the fact that their wives are not armed further solidifies the notion that the role of the family defender is a job that men are "supposed to" do. Interviews with married women who have a CHL suggest that even when women do have the means to carry a gun in public, many will choose not to do so; when they explain why, many of the women say it is because they are usually with their husbands and that their husbands are typically armed. The practice of relying on husbands for protection was most pronounced for those women who do not regularly carry their guns outside of the home. The only married women who said that they do not rely on their husbands for defense were Caroline and Jackie (whose husbands do not have CHLs) and Ruth and Mary (who described themselves as "24/7 carriers"). Though Mary does not rely on her husband for protection, she explains that "the only time I truly let my guard down is when my husband is close or when I'm sleeping and I have no choice." In explaining why she feels comfortable letting her guard down with her husband around, Mary says, "He's better than I am." She elaborated,

> He's faster; he's more accurate; he's more aware; he's a far better sheep dog than I am. So, yes, I can, I can relax around him. And that's great. The nice thing is we can trade off. If I see…he's tired, I can be a little more alert. When we're sleeping at night, when he goes to sleep he's a pretty sound sleeper, he can sleep through most anything. I allow myself to be a lighter sleeper. I allow myself to wake up and pay attention to things when I hear them. So if there's something I

> can do to give him the relief, I do. If we're traveling and I see he's tired, I'm a little more alert. So we trade off.

Mary's description of the dynamic between herself and her husband suggests that though her husband is the primary defender of the family, she is also capable and willing to play that role if need be.

Though few respondents articulated why men are often the family defender, Mary offered an explanation that is rooted in what she believes to be innate differences between men and women. When I told Mary that one of the women I interviewed said she had to come to terms with the notion that her life is more valuable than someone trying to victimize her Mary offered the following explanation,

> Absolutely. But look at where men and women are though. Men are by nature the protector and provider for their home. By nature, by God, they were made warriors. Women were made nurturers. We give life, we nurture life. Women have a huge, huge natural inborn hard-wiring to overcome to get to that point to where we would be warriors. We're only capable, with very few that are not, of being a warrior on the drop of the dime without any thought when it comes to protecting our young. That, most women have no problem. They will live, die, bite, scratch, whatever it takes to protect their young. That they will do. But when it comes to themselves? They don't have that sense of worth. They don't. And what I tell those women is, "Okay fine, you are willing to die for your young, but are you willing to live for them? If you are willing to say I'm not going to take a life to protect myself, you've given up your life for your children, and they won't have you. Wouldn't it be better to live for them? That takes a lot more courage." And some women, they go, "Ah! I've never thought of that!" And they have their moment of seeing their worth.

In addition to being a competitive shooter, Mary teaches women's only CHL and handgun self-defense courses. Though she believes that men are biologically inclined to fight while women must overcome their natural tendency to be passive in the face of victimization, she regularly works to promote women's self-defense and firearm use. She

explains above that one way she compels some women to think about self-defense is by utilizing discourses that put the safety and security of children at the forefront of their thoughts about victimization. She encourages women to be armed against violent victimization because as mothers, they would be letting their children down if they were killed by a perpetrator. Thus, rather than dismantling patriarchal gender discourses, she utilizes them in the hopes of encouraging women to be armed.

The three partnered lesbians interviewed for this study offer interesting insights into how gender shapes the role of the family defender. As was previously discussed, Catherine and Allison are partners and both have a CHL. During the period when Catherine was being stalked and harassed, she mulled obtaining a CHL but never went through with the idea. But when she and Allison decided to move in with each other, Catherine's views on having a gun for self-defense became more concrete. "That was kind of where I drew the line. I didn't want to not have a gun when I had brought this mess with me. I didn't want anybody doing anything to Allison because they were after me." Catherine had her CHL for about a year before Allison decided to become licensed. Because Catherine regularly carried a firearm, Allison decided that it would be in her best interest to know how to use it, and to be able to legally carry it should the need arise (e.g. if she were holding Catherine's bag that contained a firearm). Though they are both licensed, Allison and Catherine have different views on carrying a gun in public. Catherine explains,

> I'm a lot more into carrying. I carry more often. But that could just be, you know, because [Allison] recently got her permit. She just recently carried for the first time like last week. I think. And normally I guess she knows that I have a

> gun, so she doesn't carry, but that drives me crazy! Because I'm afraid that something will happen to her, you know, when we're not around each other. But she just got a new carry pistol this weekend, so maybe she'll start carrying that.

As a "24/7 carrier," who says that if she is dressed, she likely has a firearm with her, Catherine does not like the fact that Allison does not regularly carry her firearm with her. Allison says that she really likes the added security of having a gun in the home (she stores her gun in her bedside table for easy access), but generally, she does not feel the need to be armed in public. Allison reports that though she cannot have a firearm in her car when she is at work, she always has it in her glove box when she is not at work. When I asked her what motivates her to carry a firearm in her car she said, "Because it gives [Catherine] peace of mind."

When I told Allison that many of the men I interviewed explained a need to protect their families from harm she said that she feels the same way. Allison explains, "I mean we're a small family, but we're a family. And even the dogs, I don't want anything to happen to the dogs. I don't know if I'd take a human life over the dogs, but if there's a person that is, is entering the house, yeah, I've got a responsibility to [Catherine]." This example is instructive for a number of reasons. First, though Catherine is more experienced with shooting and has a strong desire to regularly be armed, Allison feels that they share an equal responsibility for each other's defense (this shared responsibility was partly what motivated Allison to obtain a CHL). However, this does not extend to outside of the home where Allison has yet to feel the need to carry a firearm, while Catherine regularly carries one. In fact, Allison explains her gun carrying as a way to

make Catherine feel better, rather than as something she feels she needs to do in order to be safe.

The other partnered lesbian interviewed for this story is Cindy, who, you may recall, has been carrying a pistol regularly since she was seventeen (well before CHLs were legally available). Cindy's partner, Erica (who was present for the interview), was raised in a household without guns, and in fact, her mother was adamantly anti-gun. Erica credits this early socialization for her present-day attitude towards guns: she has no interest in shooting guns (though she has done it), or relying on one for self-defense. In general, Erica is not very worried about victimization whereas Cindy is extremely cautious and concerned about crime. For example, Cindy said that one of her strategies for defense is that the couple has a house alarm that they set every night. Cindy also sets it when she leaves for work in the morning, because Erica leaves after she does and she feels nervous when Erica is home alone. In explaining that feeling, Cindy says, "Because I know she's not going to have the gun next to her all the time. You know if somebody knocks on the door in the middle of the afternoon, well if I'm home and alone a lot of times I'll have a gun with me." In contrast, Erica says, "If somebody's at our door, I look, but I don't yell at them through the door asking them who they are what they want." Cindy says, "She'll help the guy that's lost, and I'm like, that's the perfect way that they could get you!" Cindy is deeply afraid of crime, and so she is fearful that Erica is vulnerable when she is home alone.

At one point during the interview Cindy asked Erica, "If I wasn't around, would you have a gun?" Erica said, "No," and continued, "If it was just me living by myself? I

wouldn't…I'd probably have a knife." "You wouldn't keep my guns?" Cindy asked. Erica replied, "Oh, if something happened to you? Yes, I'd keep the guns." Knowing that Erica has no interest in guns, Cindy asked, "Would you use them once a year?" "Do I have to?" Erica replied, and then jokingly said, "Do I take them to the dry cleaners?" This joke was intended to make it very clear that Erica does not particularly enjoy being a gun owner, and she has no interest in becoming knowledgeable about guns.

Interviews with lesbians who have CHLs shed light on how gender shapes the construction of the family defender role. At first blush, it seems that Catherine and Cindy are family defenders, just like the men interviewed in the previous chapter. However, there are some marked differences that are important to understand. Those men who said that they needed a gun to defend their wives and children largely minimized the notion that they were vulnerable, and instead described obtaining a CHL as directly tied to being a good father and a good husband. This is not the case for Cindy and Catherine, both of whom are very clearly worried about self-defense as well as the defense of their loved ones. Because Catherine is regularly armed, Allison felt it was prudent that she also obtain a CHL and become comfortable with shooting. There is not the sense that the guns are strictly Catherine's concern. This is likely because there is not a binary gender script available for them to draw upon. Allison, who was always cautious about crime anyway, feels that she should learn about guns so that she can do for Catherine what Catherine does for her: be prepared to defend her should the need arise.

Cindy and Erica's example also sheds light on this dynamic, but for different reasons. Erica cannot relate to Cindy's feelings about crime. Whereas Cindy is terrified

of crime, Erica rarely thinks of it. Though Cindy insists on setting the alarm when she leaves the house, she admits that this is out of fear for Erica's safety. In contrast, the men I interviewed never admit to such reactions when their wives are away from them. They never say they are scared that their wives will be harmed in their absence.

Caroline and Jackie are both married to men who have no personal interest in carrying a concealed firearm. My interview with Caroline happened in her home and her husband Hank was present. During the interview I asked Hank if he had a CHL, and he said, "No." "Any interest in getting one?" I asked. He said that though he was raised around guns and used to hunt, he is not interested in carrying a firearm in public. Caroline offered a reason why, "He says he would never kill anybody." "No, I couldn't, I don't think," Hank replied. "Well I admire you for telling me that. I couldn't imagine why he wasn't taking the course, and he told me and it's not ever been a problem since." Though Caroline admires her husband for being honest, she certainly cannot relate to his feelings about being unarmed. Indeed, Caroline says, "I could shoot somebody without remorse, I know that sounds terrible. But if someone were threatening my life or my children or grandchildren, it would not keep me awake, to take care of that."

Jackie decided to take a women's-only firearm class to become more acquainted with her husband's firearms. She points to that experience as a turning point in fueling her interest in owning her own firearm and subsequently attending a CHL course. She says that she is primarily motivated by the fact that she and her family regularly drive from a city in Texas to Memphis to visit her sister-in-law. In describing her motivations, Jackie says

> My sister-in-law lives in what can best be described as a transitional neighborhood. [Laughs]. Eighty year old house in a really nice neighborhood, but people are starting to carve them up and make condos and duplexes out of them and whatnot. It's not a bad neighborhood in the sense of it's not unsafe to walk down the street or walk your dog or anything like that. But her car gets broken into about twice a year. Her house has been broken into about four times in the last few years. And I'm looking at this going, I don't want to take my kids up there; I don't want to be driving around up there without being able to protect ourselves. Again, going back to the [idea]: don't mess with my kids or you're going to have a she-tiger on your hands!

Though Jackie feels the need to be armed to defend herself and her children, she says, "I asked my husband if he wanted to get one and he said flat out, 'no.'" Jackie says that her husband does not want to have to worry about having a gun on him, "So he would just assume not have it on. I don't think it's logical, but that's his opinion and it's firmly held. And it's one of those ones where you go, 'yes dear.'" Jackie's explanation of her husband's reticence to be armed is nearly identical to those husbands I interviewed whose wives were uninterested in carrying a gun: she feels her husband is being irrational, but it is his choice to be so.

Though Mary would argue that husbands are more likely to be armed than wives because of innate characteristics, I would suggest that these dynamics largely revolve around cultural beliefs about men and women. As I argued in the previous chapter, cultural discourses construct a notion of the "good father" and "good husband" that are tied to protecting one's family from harm. These discourses are easy extensions of characteristics associated with masculinity: they entail bravery, strength, courage, etc. It likely feels "natural" for husbands to occupy the role of the family defender because it fits so well with cultural expectations of masculinity. Tellingly, when women are

licensed to carry a firearm and their husbands are not, the women do not explain that they are protecting their husbands. Those women who have children living at home say that they are primarily motivated to carry a firearm to defend their kids, a dynamic that is often explained by using analogies such as the "mama bear protecting her cubs." I would suggest that women must rely on such analogies because there is no existing cultural frame to explain a woman aggressively fighting for her own survival. When Jackie says if you mess with her kids, you'll "have a she-tiger on your hands," she is utilizing a discourse through which she can understand being a fighter rather than a victim.

CONCLUSION

The existing literature on guns and gender suggest that guns symbolize masculinity for men who use them (Gibson 1994; Connell 1995; Melzer 2009). Those studies that examine women shooters have attempted to trouble this link by exploring women gun users (Homsher 2001; Floyd 2008); however, rarely have such analyses provided a gendered analysis of the meaning of women's gun use. Those who have provided such an analysis find that women who use guns are empowered by this form of self-defense (Stange and Oyster 2000) because they are able to disrupt cultural construction of women's vulnerability (Hollander 2001). Interviews with women who have a CHL extend this analysis by examining the meanings women attach to their CHL use. These interviews suggest that women do feel empowered by their gun use and their ability to carry a gun in public—which their license legally allows them to do.

One reason they feel empowered is because they are able to master something they thought was previously the purview of men. Another reason they feel empowered is

that they feel their firearm gives them greater freedom, for example the freedom to drive long distances alone. Additionally, the two women who described experiences with victimization were able to use their handguns to reclaim a sense of personal strength that had been lost when they felt like potential victims. Such explanations of the meanings of firearm use for the women I interviewed suggest that CHLs provide women with a way to "undo gender" by disrupting feelings of insecurity that stem from cultural constructions of women's vulnerability (Hollander 2001). However, analyzing how women explain their relationship dynamics suggest that they are quick to rely on their husbands for self-defense. In such instances, women explain that their husbands are simply stronger, fast, better, or "more natural" defenders than they are. These characterizations reinforce the notion that women are supposed to rely on their husbands for protection.

The flipside of the "man as protector" role is that when women are made to feel physically dependent on men, this simultaneously reinforces that women are vulnerable to men. While some women may feel comforted that their husbands are their protectors, this dynamic reinforces the notion that men are physically superior to women, and can, if they choose, have physical control over them. The empirical evidence on crimes committed against women is clear that women are at much greater risk from men they know than from strangers. Between 1980 and 2008, 41.5 percent of women murdered were killed by an intimate (either a current or former husband or boyfriend); 30 percent of women murdered were killed by an acquaintance; and 16.7 percent of women murdered were killed by a family member. Only 12 percent of women who were murdered during this time span were killed by a stranger (Cooper and smith 2011). In

2010, 64 percent of violent victimizations committed against women were perpetrated by someone the victim knew (Truman 2011).

This evidence is not presented to suggest that Susan, Wendy, or the other women who rely on their husbands for defense are likely going to be harmed by their husbands. Nor am I suggesting that these women are contributing to violence against women. However, their reliance on their husbands stems from and contributes to the larger cultural systems of meanings in which men's aggressiveness and women's vulnerability are made to seem natural and inevitable (Hollander 2001).

CHAPTER 4: CHLs and Fear of Crime

John runs a firearm self-defense school and teaches various levels of firearm safety and self-defense tactics, from introductory pistol courses to SWAT training. In explaining the need for a CHL for self-defense, John said that the likelihood of a police officer being around when you need one is virtually zero. He continued,

> It doesn't mean that they're bad people…[or] that their organization is a failure. It means that they have a limited number of officers, and we wouldn't want to live in a country where you have a police officer at your elbow twenty four hours a day anyway. And most of the police officers would not want to work in an environment like that either. They're not interested in that. And so…you know, by definition that means that if you're going to be able to defend yourself against a violent attack from someone that has no justification for attacking you other than greed, malice, sexual, whatever, then, you've pretty much gotta be ready to take care of yourself.

John's explanation of CHL use is tied to a fairly straightforward understanding of the reality that violent crime is possible. He says, "Our joke is, 'It'll never happen to me'…is not a self-defense plan. But the vast majority of unarmed people, that's their self-defense plan. They say, 'Well why do you carry a gun? Nothing bad is ever gonna happen to me.' And I say, 'Well, let me give you some phone numbers. You know, let's talk to people that, yeah they said that too. Right before something did. Or something happened to somebody they knew.'"

In the quote above, John explains that he has a pragmatic view of crime: though most people do not anticipate that they will become a victim of crime, every year people are victimized, and many are unprepared. John, like nearly every person I interviewed, carries a gun because he feels that it is a prudent self-defense measure. Whether and how

fear of crime shapes the practice of carrying a concealed firearm is unclear. In this chapter I examine the literature on fear of crime and explore whether it is a motivating force in concealed handgun licensing. I also analyze the ways in which gender shapes fear of crime.

WHO IS AFRAID OF CRIME AND WHY?

Fear of crime emerged as an area of focus in the 1970s when researchers first realized that that there is much greater fear of crime than actual crime in the United States (Hale 1996). Fear of crime is now considered a social problem distinct from actual crime (Warr 1990) and its causes and consequences have been vigorously analyzed. Studies that focus on the causes of crime fears have examined how they are shaped by fictional crime dramas and news coverage of actual criminal events (Eschholz, Chiricos and Gertz 2003; Kort-Butler and Hartshorn 2011; Weitzer and Kubrin 2004). Analyses of consequences have focused on the extent to which fear of crime negatively impacts health (Humpel, Owen and Leslie 2002; Warr 2009), contributes to the deterioration of community life (Box, Hale, and Andrews 1988; Hale 1996), and increases residential segregation (Liska and Bellair 1995).

While much of the literature has been plagued by conceptual confusion and imprecise methodology, there is some consensus that fear of crime relates to emotional feelings of "alarm or dread caused by an awareness or expectation of danger" (Warr 2000, 453). Early research relied (often exclusively) on measuring fear by asking respondents the following, "Is there anywhere near where you live—that is, within a mile—where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?" For many years, answers to

this one question constituted the gauge of Americans' crime fears (Warr 2000). Yet, this question is so vague it is not clear precisely what it measures (Hale 1996). For example, analyses that rely on this question might exaggerate the extent to which walking at night induces fear because of crime or because of other reasons like poor health or visibility (LaGrange and Ferraro 1989).

It is also unclear whether such measures capture fear of crime or anxiety about crime (Warr 1994). According to psychologist Joseph LeDoux (2012), fear is a negative emotional response caused when we encounter a threatening stimulus, while anxiety is a negative emotional response caused when we anticipate a stimulus. LeDoux cautions that humans have a unique capacity to blur the line between real and anticipated threat, and thus, fear and anxiety are tightly intertwined and often difficult to distinguish. Sociologists are well-positioned to explore how perceptions of real and/or anticipated threat are socially constructed. In this chapter, I explore some of the ways in which license holders conceptualize threat and examine whether fear of crime motivates their desires to be armed.

Though fear of crime has been extensively studied, the link between fear of crime and the use of concealed handguns for self-defense has received scant attention. Most of the research on crime and guns examines motivations for firearm ownership (e.g. Cao, Cullen, and Link 1997; DeFronzo 1979; Kleck 1984; Lizotte and Bordua 1980; Young 1986), while those studies that analyze gun carrying have focused on adolescents and young adults (e.g. Simon, Crosby and Dahlberg 1999; Watkins, Huebner, and Decker 2008). One study that examines fear of crime among people who carry a gun for self-

defense finds that respondents report very low levels of crime fears (Bankston et al. 1990). The authors caution that this could be because of "simultaneous effects; in other words, having a gun, even if motivated by fear, reduces that fear" (Bankston et al. 1990, 298). In this study, gun carrying is not specified, and it may include carrying a gun in one's vehicle, or on one's body with or without a license to do so. To date, there is not any research that focuses on the legal use of concealed handguns for self-defense, a gap in the literature that is significant given the increasing popularity and availability of CHLs.

Altruistic Fear

According to Mark Warr and Chris Ellison (2000) it is important to distinguish personal fear from fear one may have for an intimate family member, known as altruistic fear. According to their study while 63% of respondents reported they were concerned or very concerned about their personal safety, 77% of respondents report that they are concerned or very concerned for the personal safety of their spouse. Additionally, 83% are concerned or very concerned for sons, while 88% feel the same way for their daughters. The age of one's spouse and children plays a significant role in levels of altruistic fear; approximately 55 percent of parents with children between the ages of eleven and fifteen report being very concerned for the personal safety of their children, regardless of gender. But as children grow older parental fear for daughters is much greater than for sons. For parents whose children are older than age 20, 55 percent of respondents report being very concerned for their daughters' personal safety, while fewer than 35 percent of respondents report being very concerned for their sons (Warr and

Ellison 2000). Similarly, level of fear for one's spouse is largely dependent on gender and age. Between the ages of 18 and 29, over 70 percent of men report being very concerned for their wives' personal safety while fewer than 50 percent of women are very concerned for their husbands' personal safety. As individuals age, the level of fear people have for their spouse drops and the difference between men's and women's fear narrows (Warr and Ellison 2000).

The differences between altruistic and personal fear are reflected by the different precautions taken to guard against victimization. While surveys have asked respondents to list precautionary behaviors utilized as a response to fear of crime, they have never before taken into account what behaviors are the result of altruistic fear and what are the result of personal fear. This distinction is significant, as behaviors do change based upon how altruistic fear operates for people. For example, the authors found that installing deadbolts at home, purchasing a dog for protection, and locking doors while driving are all responses to altruistic fear for one's daughter and not done out of personal fear or fear for spouse or sons. Interestingly, though levels of fear for sons and husbands are quite high, precautionary behaviors are focused on wives and daughters and not husbands or sons. In their most provocative finding, Warr and Ellison (2000) determined that men report purchasing firearms for protection, not for themselves, but because they fear for their wives' safety.

Significance of Gender in Fear of Crime

Most of the early research on fear of crime identified a central paradox: those who fear crime most, women and the elderly, are least likely to be the victims of crime

(Ferraro 1996; Madriz 1997; Stanko 1995; Warr 1984, 1994). Explanations for this paradox are far-ranging. Early research found that fear of sexual assault drives women's fear of crime (Warr 1984, 1985). Ferraro (1996) found that women fear any crime that involves face-to-face contact because of an overriding fear of rape; when fear of rape is controlled men actually express greater fear of victimization than women. In other words, for women, "fear of crime *is* fear of rape" (Warr 1984, p. 700). Tellingly, as women age and begin to see themselves as less likely targets of sexual assault their fear of crime lessens (Franklin and Franklin 2009). This finding was supported in the previous chapter by Caroline who said that as a woman in her 60s, she has come off the "high risk list."

Some scholars argue that the "gender paradox" is the result of invalid measures, rather than an accurate reflection of men and women's fear of crime (Gilchrist et. al 1998). These studies are attentive to the ways that the social construction of gender shapes how men and women explain their relationships to fear of crime. For example, Sutton and Farrall (2000) suggest that men report low fear levels because they are responding to social desirability related to masculinity. The authors find that "males…are actually more afraid of crime, but are unwilling to admit it" (Sutton and Farrall 2000, 221). Similarly, in interviews with heterosexual married men, Nicole Rader (2010) found that, in the context of marriage, men feel like they cannot admit to fearing crime because they are expected to be their wives' protectors. These studies suggest that responses to questions about crime fears are a form of "doing gender." Thus, men are doing masculinity when they perform fearlessness—in interviews or with their

spouses—and women are doing femininity when they perform fearfulness. These performances make gender differences appear natural and inevitable, though they are in fact constructed through interaction (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Studies that suggest men are hiding their crime fears might underestimate the way gender shapes how people experience and imagine vulnerability. On the one hand, men may be "doing masculinity (West and Zimmerman 1987) when they deny feeling afraid of crime (Sutton and Farrall 2000; Rader 2010). However, they may also be conveying the extent to which they feel that men are generally impervious to victimization, while women are "natural victims." Jocelyn Hollander (2001, 84) explains that

> These ideas are based, in part, on shared beliefs about gendered bodies. Female bodies are believed to be inherently vulnerable and not dangerous to others because of their smaller average size, perceived lack of strength, and physical vulnerability to rape. Males' bodies, in contrast, are seen as potentially dangerous to others because of their larger size, greater strength, and potential use as a tool of sexual violence.

It is thus possible that men are not lying about how they feel about their risk of victimization so much as they are conveying their understanding of who is a potential victim.

In chapter two I explored how masculinity shapes the ways in which men understand their CHL use. Because masculinity is associated with being strong, competent, fearless, and willing to fight (Kimmel 2010), it makes sense that men would be unwilling to admit to feeling afraid. However, it is also likely that the cultural meanings that link masculinity with toughness and aggression mean that most men simply do not see themselves as potential victims. The opposite is true for women, who

are often taught to see themselves as potential victims and to guard against what is constructed as the ubiquitous threat of male aggression (Hollander 2001). The social construction of women's vulnerability revolves around a belief that women's bodies are threatened by sexual assault. Joceyln Hollander (2001, 95) explains that, "Given the widespread misconception that sexual assaults are motivated by victim's attractiveness, girls and young women are perceived to be at risk because of this intersection of gender, age, and sexuality."

Criminal victimization is most often imagined as happening when strangers sexually assault women (Valentine 1992). These cultural constructions contribute to women's fear and are a form of patriarchal power. As Madriz (1997, 14) writes, "The possibility of violence and the fear it produces are fundamental elements in the control of women's lives." Patriarchal definitions of gender make male aggression and dangerousness seem natural and female passivity and vulnerability seem inevitable (Connell 1995; Hollander 2001; Madriz 1997).

Perceived Vulnerability

Though early studies muddled the distinction, fear of crime is conceptually different from perceived vulnerability, a concept that captures the extent to which people feel they have a realistic chance of becoming a victim of crime (Ferraro 1995; Rountree and Land 1996; Warr and Stafford 1983). According to the literature, this distinction is important. While fear of crime is primarily concerned with the emotional response to the perceived risk of victimization, perceived vulnerability captures a person's cognitive assessment of their likelihood of victimization (Ferraro and LaGrange 1987; Ferraro

1995; Warr 2000). The difference is explained by Adams and Serpe (2000, 607) when they write, "Although fear and perceived vulnerability are clearly related, it is possible for people to fear crime but not see themselves as vulnerable to it. People may also view themselves as vulnerable to criminal activity and not feel fearful."

In some cases, perceived vulnerability and fear of crime have a positive relationship. Though they have lower victimization rates, women and the elderly have higher levels of crime fears than men and younger people because they perceive themselves to be vulnerable to serious crimes, particularly rape and sexual assault (Ferraro 1996; Warr 1984). The perceived seriousness of a particular crime (e.g. rape or murder) interacts with perceived vulnerability to either heighten or diminish fear of crime (Warr and Stafford 1983).

Perceived vulnerability is important in my study because CHL holders are unlikely to ever have the opportunity to use their handguns in self-defense. In Texas, a license holder can draw their firearm only if he or she "reasonably believes" that deadly force or a threat of deadly force is necessary to defend against "aggravated kidnapping, murder, sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault, robbery, or aggravated robbery" (Texas Penal Code § 9.31.1). Thus, CHLs are only defenses against the most serious, and most unlikely, forms of victimization. Nevertheless, the extent to which CHL holders perceive that they are vulnerable to serious crimes will likely have a bearing on their motivations to carry a concealed handgun.

There is some evidence to suggest that people who live in areas with strong gun cultures might have greater perceived vulnerability than those who live in places where

gun use is less common. Felson and Pare (2010) found that in regions where guns are readily available there are higher rates of gun violence and individuals are more likely to resort to guns for self-defense. Texas is a state with a strong pro-gun culture (Smith and Martos 1999), a place where gun laws are relatively lax and gun ownership is common. In the current research I ask whether CHL holders explain their own gun use as a response to their belief that they are vulnerable because they perceive that others are armed.

Effects of Self-Defense?

In addition to asking how fear of crime and/or perceived vulnerability shape individuals' desires to become licensed to carry a gun in public, I also ask whether obtaining a CHL has an impact on these phenomena. Though it seems logical that people carry a gun to reduce their vulnerability to crime, there is some evidence to suggest that the steps one takes as a result of crime fears can have the unintended consequences of heightening those fears. Liska, Sanchirico, and Reed's (1988) analysis of the ways in which people alter their lives as a response to fear of crime finds that instead of reducing fear, these steps increase fear. However, because firearms are the most lethal self-defense strategy available, they may be uniquely suited for reducing fear for those who carry guns (Bankston et al. 1990). The purpose of this stage of the analysis is not to parse functional and dysfunctional fears (the former is explained as fear that plays a positive role in helping people safely navigate life, while the latter impairs one's ability to navigate life (Jackson and Gray 2010)). Instead, the aim of this portion of the analysis is

to examine how CHL holders explain the impact of carrying a concealed firearm on their fear of crime and/or perceived vulnerability.

That some people feel the need to carry a concealed firearm in public suggests the existence of a perception of risk. However, whether this risk is related to fear of crime is unclear. In this chapter, I will address these gaps and extend this literature by analyzing the following research questions: What is the role of fear of crime in individuals' decisions to obtain a CHL? How does perceived vulnerability shape their desires to be licensed? Do respondents feel that having a CHL reduces their fear of crime and perceived vulnerability? Finally, I ask how gender shapes these phenomena, to better understand fear of crime in general.

Feeling Afraid or Feeling Vulnerable?

It was uncommon for the people that I interviewed to explain that they carry a gun because they fear crime. When I asked respondents if there was an incident that motivated their desire to obtain a concealed handgun license, most said rather than a single incident, they had a general sense that something could happen. A representative example comes from Richard, who says, "I didn't have any actual instance. [It was not]…out of fear or anything like that, other than you know, I'm just a realist. You know eventually you're gonna get in a car wreck, eventually something might happen to you and you want to be as prepared as you can." Richard, like many others I interviewed, feels that an awareness of the possibility of criminal victimization makes him a "realist," and not someone who lives in fear. In contrast, four people, all of whom are women,

explained that fear factored into why they wanted a CHL. In light of previous research on fear of crime, this gender difference is not surprising (Ferraro 1996; Warr 1984).

The clearest case of fear of crime motivating a respondent's desire to obtain a CHL comes from Cindy, 39. Cindy received a semi-automatic .380 as a gift from her parents when she was seventeen. Though she was reared in a home with guns and regularly went on hunting trips with her father, this was the first gun that Cindy called her own. Despite the fact that it was illegal to do so, Cindy took her firearm with her to college and regularly carried it in her backpack while on campus.

Cindy says she was particularly glad to have a gun when she was out studying late at night and had to walk across campus by herself. She explains, "There were a couple of times where people were getting raped and attacked on campus and especially walking out to the parking lots out in the middle of nowhere, so in those instances [I] definitely [carried my gun]. And I've always been very cautious. Our house was broken into in [my home town] when we were there. And that's always been a fear to be attacked or hurt, so just wanting to avoid that is big; it's huge." Cindy identifies classic examples of scenarios that induce fear of crime (Warr 1990), as factors that motivated her to be armed when she was younger. When I asked Cindy if she was concerned about breaking the law, she said, "Oh, no. I didn't care. I'd rather have the gun than be hurt." Cindy's argument boils down to this: the only way anyone would know she had a gun is if she had to use it to defend herself, in which case, the relief of having a gun would far-outweigh any criminal repercussions she might face. However, because she now has the right to

carry a firearm legally, Cindy much prefers to comply with the law and so she has a CHL.

When I told Cindy that she had the longest gun-carrying history of anyone I had interviewed she responded, "I'm a fraidy cat." I asked, "Would you say you're afraid of crime?" She said, "Definitely…So I feel better when I'm carrying [a gun]." Though Cindy does not carry every day, she almost always carries a gun if she knows she'll be out late or if she's driving long distances. In explaining what compels her to want to be armed she says, "It probably depends on…the feeling at the time, the crime rate, maybe, stuff on the news. You know, I might have heard that more is going on in the area, and I'll keep it on me more during those times. You know, I get a little bit more paranoid when I hear those kinds of things. The television, you know, we had some crime going on a little bit north of us, and I carried it more." Cindy's explanation of how she decides whether to carry her gun with her suggests both that fear of crime drives her CHL use and that her crime fears are shaped by stories in local news reports, a common source of fear of crime (Kort-Butler and Hartshorn 2011).

Ashley, 30, had a similar explanation for why she carries a gun in public. Ashley became a CHL holder in 2005 because her father, who runs a gun range and is a CHL instructor, needed help teaching his increasingly crowded CHL licensing classes. Ashley said that fear of crime did not compel her to become licensed; however, she followed that statement with this explanation for why she carries a gun: "I am very paranoid. I don't want to say paranoid, but it's the best I can think [of]. I'm a very paranoid person. Stuff happens, I see it in the news and I am not ignorant or oblivious to it." Like Cindy's

comment above, Ashley has learned to fear crime primarily by watching televised new coverage of criminal incidents.

Gender is central to why Ashley feels she needs to carry a gun. She says, "If something happens and I am alone, my husband will not always be there, and someone will not always be there to protect me." Later she elaborates, "I'm a woman alone. I'm not a large woman. Someone may see me as easy [to] overpower, and [will do] whatever they do. And I…want to be able to protect myself." This comment is a twist on the larger personal responsibility ethos that shapes carrying a concealed handgun for those that I interviewed. Nearly all of my respondents emphasized that individuals have to take responsibility for their own defense. For most, this personal responsibility was explained as not waiting for the police to solve one's problems. For Ashley, personal responsibility includes a rejection of the notion that she should rely on her husband for protection. Ashley's explanation reveals the paradox of gendered discourses of vulnerability identified by Hollander (2001): women are taught both to fear men and to rely on them for protection. Rather than feeling helpless, Ashley, and other women who obtain CHLs for self-defense decide to carry firearms and take their defense into their own hands.

Advocates for CHL use often argue that concealed handguns are superior to all other forms of self-defense because they can "level the playing field," between people of unequal body size. This is what is meant when guns are referred to as "equalizers." In the previous chapter I argued that this "equalizer" discourse is one of the reasons women described guns as empowering. But what is important to note is that the ability to carry a gun does not alter the belief that women are inherently vulnerable to men. For example,

when I told Allison that one of my areas of interest with this project was exploring how men and women think about self-defense differently she said, "Yeah, we definitely live our lives differently than men do. We have to." "In what ways?" I asked. "Well, just because, because we're, I hate to say it, but we are, we're weaker. We're physically weaker. We need something to level off the fight [pause]. Should there ever be one." When I asked her what role firearms play in this dynamic she explained, "If a man wants to bash my head in…there's very little I can do about that, physically. I can try, and I may win. But if I have a firearm, then I have a little bit of a better chance of surviving. Hopefully. You never know." Allison's explanation reinforces the notion that women's bodies are inherently vulnerable to male aggression. Though she thinks she might have a chance to fight off a man who is intent on hurting her, she is much more confident about her chances for survival if she is armed.

As I argued in earlier chapters, bodies are symbols that convey gendered meanings (Crawley, Foley, Shehan 2008). My interviews suggest that men and women both believe that women are potential victims because they are presumed to be smaller and weaker than men. This is considered to be a simple fact of life that women must learn to deal with. Some women experience this realization as fear. Others suggest "that's just the way it is."

The vast majority of the CHL holders I interviewed explained that they have a license to carry a gun not because they are afraid of crime, but because they believe that without a readily available gun, they are potentially vulnerable. There are two primary factors that shape respondents' perceived vulnerability. The first is when they feel that

their bodies leave them physically unable to protect themselves from victimization. This was the case for some women who said their small stature made them targets (as Ashley explained above) and for older respondents who feared they may be less capable of defending themselves as they aged (a finding discussed at length in the chapter on men). The second factor that shapes respondents' sense of vulnerability is a belief that criminals have guns and thus, they can overpower someone who is unarmed, no matter how strong or capable they may be.

Despite the similarities, there is a distinction in these explanations that could have a bearing on the fear of crime literature. When some men age, they perceive that they are less physically able to fight back should they be attacked by a criminal; however, there is nothing in my interviews that suggests that they believe that criminals see them as targets. This is in contrast to how the women I interviewed explained their vulnerability: they imagine that as women, they are marked by others as weak, easy victims and so they want to be armed. Because women's bodies are sexualized and objectified in American culture, women are socialized with an expectation that they will be seen as objects of heterosexual male desire (Bordo 1995; Stanko 1995); indeed, women's status is in part defined by their ability to attract heterosexual men (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008). The implication of these findings is that perceived vulnerability might have two conceptually distinct components: perceived vulnerability may be high for people who feel they cannot defend themselves and high for people who feel that others see them as a target of crime. The consequence is that those who most feel like a target and least capable of self-defense have the greatest perceived vulnerability.

More Guns, More Guns

Most of my respondents likely overestimate the extent to which they are at risk of violent crime in their daily lives. Nevertheless, many respondents say that they don't believe that they are likely to be victims of crime, but that it is "better to have a gun and not need it, than to need it and not have it." Though nearly everyone I interviewed emphasized that they hope that they never have the occasion to use their guns, most of them carry a firearm regularly and many of them carry at every opportunity. The primary explanation for why CHL holders want the legal right to carry a gun is explained by Bill, a 38 year old CHL instructor who said, "You don't bring a knife to a gun fight." John, 44, offered his twist on that sentiment when he said, "If you're gonna be confronted with a gun on the street, then certainly having a gun [is important]. You know the first rule of a gun fight is [to] have a gun." Otherwise, you can't fight back, and "all you can be in is a shooting." John's view is that in the unlikely event that someone is attacked by a person with a gun, their only way out of the situation is to have a gun themselves.

Nearly everyone I interviewed discussed their conviction that criminals have guns and so to prevent their victimization, law-abiding citizens should also be armed. This supports Felson and Pare (2010) who found that people who live in gun cultures are more likely to use guns for self-defense. The extent to which armed criminals heighten perceived vulnerability for CHL holders was made clearest by Mark, 34. Mark stands nearly seven feet tall and weighs close to 300 pounds. Mark explained that when he was growing up, he never felt particularly vulnerable. It wasn't until he had a job as a bouncer in nightclub that Mark realized how vulnerable he could be. On one occasion a

man had to be escorted out of the club. As he was leaving he pulled his shirt tail back and Mark saw a flash of silver that indicated he had a gun in his waistband. Mark says, "It scared the beejezus out of me." As a very large man trained in self-defense, Mark felt vulnerable when he saw that a threatening man was armed. The presence of a firearm made Mark's size irrelevant; a smaller man with a gun could overpower him, and he admits to feeling afraid.

Research on perceived vulnerability has often focused on the disconnect between individuals' belief in the likelihood of victimization and their actual chance of victimization (Lupton and Tulloch 1999). What is interesting about the CHL holders I interviewed is that many are aware that there is a low probability that they will ever have the occasion to use their guns. John explains that a firearm is an important tool for self-defense because the types of crimes one would be armed for are what John calls "low probability, high consequence" events. In other words, the only time a CHL holder will use their gun is in the very unlikely event that their life is at risk and they have no other alternative. CHL training emphasizes that a concealed firearm is the self-defense tactic of last resort. In fact, training in non-violent dispute resolution is a state mandated part of the CHL course in Texas.

John says that there is much you can do to "increase your risk of being in a shooting. For example, "if you hang out with people who have criminal records" or "if you buy and sell narcotics." On the other hand, John says you can avoid high risk behaviors and still be at the wrong place at the wrong time. He likens this scenario to someone having an unforeseen medical crisis. John relayed the following story: "my

cousin dropped dead in front of her pre-school class. [She] had a brain aneurism while she was teaching pre-school. [She's] teaching eyes roll back in her head, boom! Hit the ground. Goodbye. No warning. Nothing. That was it. Brain aneurism, never saw it coming, didn't know it was gonna happen." John uses this experience as an analogy for random acts of violent crime. "There are people, you know, I'm going about my day, I'm doing my thing, I'm at Luby's, WHAM! There's some nut bag who just drove through the [door], he's got a gun; he's shooting people. That's why I carry a concealed handgun. Because you can do everything right. Everything right. And still be at the wrong place at the wrong time."

Like many respondents, John mentions Luby's (a cafeteria restaurant based in Texas) because of the highly publicized shooting that occurred in Killeen, Texas in 1991. As I discussed in the introduction, this incident, a random act of violence by a heavily armed, mentally ill man, helped to propel the legislative push for CHLs in Texas. Like other stories of mass shootings that respondents refer to (e.g., Columbine, V Virginia Tech), this story captures the essence of how vulnerability functions for CHL holders who say that because they live in a society where guns are readily available, at any time, any place, a person with a gun can decide to take your life. According to this perspective the only safe response is to be armed in self-defense.

These explanations for CHL use highlight that overt expressions of crime fear are less of a motivating factor for carrying a gun than perceived vulnerability. However, in this schema perceived vulnerability is understood to exist in the form of "high consequence, low probability" events. In other words, CHL holders believe that unarmed

individuals are vulnerable not because they have a great chance of victimization, or because they feel anxious about threat, but because if they are victimized it will likely be by someone who has a firearm. If they are unarmed, they will have no chance to fight back. Thus, random acts of violence, particularly high profile mass shootings, often factor into CHL holders' explanations of vulnerability. CHL holders explain that they carry guns so that they are prepared to respond to such attacks, no matter how unlikely they may be.

Learning to Fear?

As was discussed above, perceived vulnerability is a factor that motivated many of the people I interviewed to become licensed. Many respondents claim that carrying a concealed firearm reduces their feelings of vulnerability because they feel better prepared to respond to a potentially threatening situation, particularly if that situation involves a threatening person with a gun. However, for some respondents the process of becoming a CHL holder seems to heighten their sense of danger. I first became aware of this through self-reflexively processing my own emotional responses both to the content of my interviews, and the information presented in the CHL courses I attended. Because carrying a concealed firearm in public is a self-defense practice intended to stop the most serious of crimes—particularly violent assaults and murder—when respondents explain the need to be armed against such attacks, they often do so by explaining how horrific victimization would be without "a way out." It was common for respondents to relay stories of well-known crimes that have occurred in the past (like the Luby's incident described earlier) and less well-known incidents like terrifying 911 calls that are

chronicled on YouTube. These are fear-inducing stories that constitute a kind of folklore around victimization that are important in shaping the larger worldview that leads a person to feel that being armed is a prudent response to a dangerous world.

Respondents report that the more firearm self-defense training they receive, and the more exposure they have to what might be referred to as CHL culture, the more they become aware that they are actually much more vulnerable than they had previously realized. Mark says that even though he had professional experience as a bodyguard, his advanced firearm training made him realize that he knew very little about how to protect himself and his family from harm. He says, "I felt stupid. You know, I went eleven years. If I could have all that time back to train the right way? You know, it would be night and day." Though nothing happened to Mark or his family before he received advanced training, his newfound knowledge and experiences lead him to look back on the times when he was less capable of defending himself and his family, and he feels that they were all more vulnerable than he had realized.

Most respondents say that they have learned that part of being prepared to respond to threat is to imagine scenarios where they might be victimized and to plan for how they will respond. For example, Mark says, "You know, I've had the carjacking situation. You know, somebody sticks a gun in my face, I'm gonna push them away." He tells his wife, that "She shouldn't lean forward, she should lean back. It's, if it's gonna [fire, it will go] right into the dash. That kind of a thing. Um…if there's more than one, we're getting out of the car period, we're not gonna fight. They can have the car. You know." While these scenarios are intended to increase preparedness, they are related to the

textbook definition of anxiety, where a threatening stimulus is not present but is anticipated (LeDoux 2012). Though these scenarios might induce anxiety, they are worked through so that a license holder can develop a plan for escaping or otherwise dealing with a violent victimization. Thus, firearms give their users a sense of control over threatening situations.

One example of the heightened vulnerability that CHL carriers have when they are unarmed comes from Susan, 33. Susan was never very interested in using guns for self-defense until she met her husband, a former marine who is a competitive shooter and CHL instructor. Susan says that since becoming a CHL license holder and instructor, her views on self-defense have completely changed. Though Susan believes she is safer now than she was before, there is some evidence to suggest that her new perspective sometimes makes her feel more vulnerable. She told me a story about a time she was Christmas shopping late one night at Wal-Mart and had left her gun at home. She says she thought to herself, "Man, I'm out this late, and I didn't bring my gun with me. And wouldn't you know, tonight would just be the night that I'd have that bad luck." As she walked up to the store she saw a man holding something in his hand with his arm held up at a ninety degree angle, "and he was walking with a couple of other people and I fell down [laughs] up against the soda machine for like a second, because here I was, just thinking about my situational awareness." It turns out the man was an employee holding a price gun. At the time, Susan thought, "Now, I didn't have my gun with me tonight. [But] what if?' Because you never know when and where it's gonna happen." Though to some, this incident might look like an over-reaction, Susan explains it the following way:

> I don't want to say that was paranoia, I want to say I was maybe [pause] looking into it too much, but it just reinforced that if this is what you believe if you are prepared to take those actions…you carry your gun with you everywhere you go and you choose not to go to certain places or businesses. Because you can't take it everywhere you go. And some people are just that serious.

What is most evident in this story is that Susan has developed a sense of dependency on her firearm. This suggests that the sense of empowerment firearms can give their users might have unintended consequences such as an increased fear of crime and heightened feelings of vulnerability when unarmed.

In describing how she views the world, Susan says, "I don't want to say I'm on a heightened level of paranoia, but I'm very aware of what's happening around me. You know, almost like somebody's who's been raped or attacked, they're always looking behind them, or they're just much more aware of where they go and what they do. I find myself always, you know, just taking account of where I'm at." Though she insists she's not paranoid, there was a clear edge to Susan that was evident during our interview. We sat at a small table in a Starbucks that wasn't very crowded. At one point during our conversation, a Starbucks employee was cleaning the coffee bar behind us and banged a sugar canister against the countertop. Susan jumped and quickly turned around. The employee apologized and Susan laughed.

Another example of how learning to become a CHL holder increases vulnerability comes from Ruth. As you might recall, Ruth first learned how to shoot a gun a few years ago when her husband became interested in obtaining a CHL. Ruth felt ill-prepared to send off the paperwork to obtain her license after she completed her licensing course. She said the class was too fast, there was too much information for one day, and she was

not sure she wanted to carry a gun without more training. She says, "I thought, 'I don't want to carry that until I really feel like I can confidently use it.' So, we took [two] NRA…classes. I read a couple of books, went to the range and practiced a few times, so it was probably a good five or six months…[until] I actually felt like, okay, I want to mail mine in…" It was clear that early on in her experience, Ruth lacked the confidence she needed to become a CHL holder. However, over time her sense of confidence with her firearm and gun laws has grown and she now carries her handgun regularly.

Throughout the interview Ruth explained that she and her husband watch television shows about self-defense, and she credits these shows with teaching them about effective ways to respond to crime. She says, "I think going through the class and all and those shows, I tell anybody: you learn, even if you don't want to carry a gun, you need to be aware of these personal defense things that you can think of ahead of time. Where are you going to sit? Where are you going to look? What are you going to see? If somebody's acting funny, walking funny, you know. Maybe I should leave now, you know." Though she didn't use the term, Ruth is describing what the CHL instructors I interviewed call "situational awareness." Instructors use the concept to explain how to remain alert to threat and be prepared to react to potential victimization.

Chris, 63, a retired police officer and CHL instructor, explained the importance of situational awareness as follows: "It does no good to have a concealed handgun, if you're not aware of your surroundings. Criminals like the element of surprise. If they know that you're not paying any attention to them, you know, they will take advantage of that, and you will become a victim and your gun [is] not going to help you."

Additionally, the instructors I interviewed emphasized that situational awareness can help a person to avoid having to pull their gun—an action that everyone I interviewed agreed should be avoided if at all possible.

Though Ruth did not explain that her desire for a CHL was motivated by a fear of crime or perceived vulnerability, her perception of potential victimization has grown since becoming licensed. In the following story Ruth describes a time she was able to utilize a self-defense strategy she has learned:

> One time I was pumping gas and…my gun was in the car…I lock all the doors and I only unlock my door see, because I know, and I've seen videos where someone will come up and open the passenger door and steal your purse. So I lock all my doors except for my door… Well this guy, him and this other lady, they were standing around the gas station, apparently the gas station let them try to sell a cleaner or something like that. So he walks up to me and he starts to ask me about this, and I said, "Get away from me! Leave me alone!" Normally I might not have done that, but being that I'm a little more aware of what's going on around me, I don't know you from anybody and I don't need somebody selling me something when I'm pumping gas. And I just want to be straight-forward and bold and say that. And he said okay ma'am and he just walked away. And now I don't care if I hurt his feelings or-. [Pause]. I was looking out for me. I wasn't trying to be rude, but I really don't need to be really nice to everybody. You know some of those parents are teaching their kids to be nice. They need to teach you to be aware and sometimes there's a time when you don't need to be nice. Not nasty, but you know, get away from me I don't need to talk to you, leave me alone.

Ruth credits the television shows she and her husband watch and the books she reads for teaching her to be vigilant against perceived threat. What is clear is that this is a developing sense of potential victimization that Ruth did not have prior to becoming a CHL holder.

While some might resent the heightened sense of vulnerability that comes with this new perspective, Ruth says she is grateful. Indeed, she so values this worldview that

she looks forward to teaching it to her granddaughters. Ruth says, "One, she's not even five yet and the other is two and a half, but I want to teach them that. Because you see these people who are oblivious and they could walk right into a convenience store being robbed and not even know it because they're talking on the phone." Most respondents make a distinction between themselves and people who are oblivious to their surroundings. It is not the case that those I interviewed want to use their gun to intervene in other people's lives, but it was common for the CHL holders that I interviewed to describe themselves as aware of the world in ways that others are not. Such statements suggest that rather than being an irrational response to an unlikely event, CHL holders consider a heightened sense of vigilance to be a prudent response to a dangerous world.

These interviews also suggest that there may be some very real social costs to the heightened sense of risk that is a part of learning to become a CHL holder. Situational awareness is not simply about paying attention to what is around you, it is also a process of anticipating threat and being wary of the unfamiliar. The line between being cautious and being suspicious is certainly a fine one, as is evidenced by Ruth's story and similar stories I heard from respondents. When respondents explain that they do not need strangers to approach them, or that when they are home, they answer their door with a loaded gun, they are describing a worldview in which few can be trusted and social bonds are weak.

In the schema of concealed handgun licensing the ever-present potential for victimization justifies the need for a concealed firearm in public. Thus, learning to become a CHL holder involves a process of learning to anticipate victimization and

developing a heightened vigilance against threat. Mark, Ruth, and the other respondents who shared similar experiences are grateful for their newfound worldviews; they say that they are not more fearful now, but that they are more aware. The stories they use to explain this "awareness" suggest that vigilance, perceived vulnerability, and fear of crime are tightly related concepts whose distinctions may be somewhat overblown in the literature. Only four of the forty people I interviewed for this project say that they are afraid of crime. Mark and Ruth are not among those four. And yet, their responses suggest that they perceive much more threat now than they did prior to becoming licensed. However, because they are regularly armed with the capacity to respond to that threat, because they feel that they have control over threatening situations, they generally feel less vulnerable.

CONCLUSION

While few respondents explain that they obtained a CHL because they fear crime, many suggest that they feel vulnerable without a firearm. Much of this perception of vulnerability is related to two things: 1) guns are widely available to criminals and thus most crimes will involve violent victimization; and 2) the police are ineffective when it comes to stopping or preventing violent crime. As a consequence, the CHL holders I interviewed say that responsible people need to be willing to take their defense into their own hands.

"Having a way out" of violent crime is precisely what most CHL holders want. One side-effect of becoming licensed to carry a gun seems to be the development of a new attitude on crime and victimization. As a part of the CHL licensing process,

instructors teach students about various scenarios in which it would be appropriate and inappropriate to use their gun. As a rule, all instructors argue that the most important tool for self-defense is not your gun, but your brain. They describe a need for what is termed "situational awareness" a concept that refers to the ways in which people navigate their lives aware of their surroundings and vigilant against potential threat.

Despite the insistence that the brain is the most important weapon, CHL users carry firearms because handguns are considered the best tool available to respond to potential victimization. Because the premise of CHL licensing is that victimization is a random event that sometimes cannot be avoided, instructors teach their classes to be ever-alert for danger. This leads people who are immersed in CHL culture to both see potential threat everywhere and to feel that their firearm is the only trustworthy answer to this threat. Thus, some CHL holders may develop a tenuous relationship between empowerment and vulnerability that requires that they be armed to feel safe. In other words, they become increasingly dependent on their guns. Though this makes them less vulnerable when armed, it also seems to increase their feelings of vulnerability when they do not have their firearm with them. This may be particularly consequential for women, who are socialized to see themselves as natural victims (Hollander 2001; Madriz 1997). While the development of what is termed situational awareness increases their vigilance against potential threat, when they are unarmed, this has the consequence of increasing their feelings of vulnerability. It as though their sense of empowerment resides in their gun, not in themselves, limiting the extent to which CHL use ultimately empowers those women who use this form of self-defense.

Just as the social construction of men as invulnerable runs counter to the relatively high rates of victimization that men experience (Ferraro 1996), the notion that women are more vulnerable to "stranger danger" than intimate partner violence flies in the face of evidence (Stanko 1995). Despite these empirical realities, boys are socialized to see themselves as impervious to victimization, while girls are socialized to see themselves as targets of potential crime, particularly crime perpetrated by strangers. These constructs have the potential to heighten women's crime fears as they experience "an exaggerated fear of strangers and unknown settings" (Franklin and Franklin 2009, p. 99). Though carrying a concealed firearm might mitigate these crime fears, becoming a CHL user involves a process of learning to anticipate potential victimization. This may heighten a dynamic that is already central to what it means to be a woman: know that you are vulnerable.

CHAPTER 5: Good Guys and Bad Guys

As part of the interview process, I asked respondents if they ever had a time when they did not have a gun on them and they felt threatened. In the following passage, Krysti explains a time that she did not have her gun with her (a Glock 17, 9mm) when she was housesitting. I start with the question that I asked Krysti before her story to contextualize her response.

> Angela: Some of the people I've spoken with have said that they've really had to come to terms with the idea that if they're carrying a gun, some day they might have to shoot and kill someone. Have you gone through that process?
>
> Krysti: I have. I have no problem with that. You know, you asked me about a situation where I didn't have the gun, and this just came to me, because I have always said that I will shoot first and ask questions later. Um, one of the houses, where I house sit…she has a dog that barks incessantly. Well anyway…in her neighborhood, it's one of those hit or miss neighborhoods. You can have a row of nice houses and then turn the corner and you'll have a crack house. So, I always carry at her house. And if I have to go out to my car at night to get something, I take my gun with me just in case. Well, this particular incident it was like two months ago, she had asked me at the last minute to house sit. I packed in a hurry; I forgot [my gun] at home. I forgot her at home. And I came in late one night, it was about midnight. And I came in late and I let the dog out in the backyard for her business and I thought, oh, shoot! I left my phone in my car. So I go out to my car to get my phone. And normally I would have taken my gun with me to this particular house.

Well, now I thank God that I didn't take her because I reach into the passenger side, my door's open, I reach in grab my phone, shut the door and when I shut the door the neighbor, the man next door, is standing right there. Scared the hell out of me. My heart was in my throat. I gasped, you know, I panicked. I was just frozen. And…he goes, "Oh, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry." I'm like, "what the hell! What are you doing?!" And he said, "I'm so sorry, but could you bring your dog in? My wife is trying to sleep." And I said, "You have no idea how lucky you are. You have no idea how lucky you are." And he said, "Well I'm so sorry." He didn't even have a clue. So he went back inside and I got to thinking about that situation, of how I felt, and it was that sheer, it was that fear. And you are frozen. You freeze at that moment. And I got to thinking, would I have frozen and been able to compute, "Oh, neighbor." Or would I have frozen at first and then had a knee jerk reaction? What would I have done? I don't know. I don't know.

Angela: Does that scenario concern you?

Krysti: Yes it does concern me, because I know the man. He's married and has two children and has a little bitty baby. And I could have shot him and I could have killed him, because she's loaded with hollow points. And he was so close. I could have killed him. You know? And yes, the gravity of the situation has really messed with me a little bit. But then again, I think, well he was being a dumbass. He was coming up to a woman at twelve midnight. She was outside by herself and he basically snuck up on me. He could have been walking up the driveway and [said], "Hello! Hello!" But instead, as soon as I shut the door, he was standing right there.

That's Friday the Thirteen-ish there. You know, that's, don't do that. So, you gotta think, well if he was dumb enough to put himself in a situation like that…it's not my fault.

The above story is compelling for a number of reasons. Those opposed to firearms might see it as a perfect example of the type of horrific accident that can happen when someone introduces a firearm into a situation that need not turn violent. Thankfully Krysti did not have her firearm with her, and the "what if" game is only hypothetical. What is perhaps most compelling is the ways in which Krysti explains the man she encountered in the driveway. The fact that he is married, has a baby, etc., marks him as a "good man," in sharp contrast to the people who might wander over from the "crack houses" down the street. Moreover, though the events of that night "messed [her] up for a little bit," she has also found a way to explain the incident in a way that makes sense to her: given the setting, the time, and the fact that she was a woman alone, the neighbor would have ultimately been culpable had she shot him. As I will argue, this dual focus on personal responsibility and the construction of "good guys" versus "bad guys" is central to how concealed handgun licenses are understood.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF CRIME

On its face crime might be seen as an objective fact that is best measured by whether or not a law is violated. Yet, like all other facets of social life, crime is a social construct. Both what counts as a crime and what solutions are offered to remedy those crimes, are the product of cultural meanings (Griswold 1994). One of the most

significant ways in which meanings shape crime is in how crimes are imagined and represented. Critical criminologists argue that who is considered a likely threat and who is a likely victim are social constructions that reflect power dynamics shaped by race, class, and gender (Madriz 1997).

In an earlier chapter I analyzed how the men I interviewed draw upon discourses of the "ideal gun user" propagated by groups like the NRA to make sense of their desire for a concealed handgun. I suggested that hegemonic masculinity is central to how men understand their gun use. In this chapter I extend that discussion by analyzing how race and class intersect with gender in the "good guy" construct. Race and class are central to hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), but have been virtually ignored in the literature on guns and masculinity. This elision is significant particularly because the image of the ideal gun user that is constructed by the NRA emerges alongside controlling images of black masculinity that frame black males as "threats to white society" (Collins 2006, 75). In this chapter I explore how racialized discourses shape the meanings around gun use in the production of "good guys" and "bad guys."

THE CENTRALITY OF RACE IN PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME

In the same way that beliefs about gender shape the way men and women are expected to behave in society (West and Zimmerman 1987), the "common sense" that buttresses racism "provides the rules for perceiving and dealing with the Other in a racialized society" (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 44). This happens through the process of racial formation, the way in which meanings are created about different racial groups that are structurally situated with competing interests (Omi and Winant 1994). Though

racialization provides all people with a "common sense understanding" of race, it is a process that is most significant because of the way that it privileges whiteness and oppresses people of color (Bonilla-Silva 2001).

One of the most persistent ideas that white Americans hold about black Americans is the association of blackness with crime (Feagin 2010; Russell 2009; Madriz 1997). According to Joe Feagin (2010, 105), "Much social science and other research shows that many whites automatically connect black Americans as a group with crime, while they do not easily associate whites as a group with crime." More specifically, white Americans tend to believe that black *men* are criminals. This association has led Kathreyn Russell (2009, 3) to coin the term "criminalblackman," a concept that identifies the social reality that "the picture that comes to mind when most of us think about crime is the picture of a young black man." The image of the criminalblackman has been facilitated by media representations that have utilized threatening black men as narrative tropes (Russell 2009).

Though the discursive link between black men and violence has a long history in the U.S. (Feagin 2010) contemporary manifestations of this association have been facilitated through media representations. Through the 1980s and 1990s televisions across the United States were filled with news coverage of the effects of the War on Drugs in urban areas (Reeves and Campbell 1994). The post-industrial economic vacuum that existed in American inner cities (Wilson 1997) contributed to a burgeoning drug trade, particularly around crack cocaine (Reinarman and Levine 1997). The combined effects of the drug itself, the violence associated with its use and dealing, and

the devastating impact of the "War on Drugs" further marginalized black Americans living in inner cities (Reiman and Leighton 2010; Winemute 2006). One reason for this further marginalization was that media representations from news, to films, to rap music persistently linked black masculinity with violence (Russell 2009). Tellingly, these representations of "blackness" have largely been shaped by white politicians' interests (Reinarman and Levine 1997) and white consumer tastes (Collins 2006). For example, the profitability of hardcore "gangsta rap," in hip-hop was primarily driven by white male consumers who seemed particularly drawn to lyrics that "turned the blighted conditions of ghetto poverty into an oasis of adolescent fantasy and popular entertainment" (Watkins 2005, 46).

One consequence of these characterizations is that the black male criminal has become a "controlling image" of blackness in the white imagination (Collins 2006). In other words, white Americans tend to associate all black men with the potential for criminality and violence, regardless of criminal history or socio-economic standing (Anderson 2008). This representation is a form of gendered racism according to which black men are characterized as "threats to white women, prone to criminal behavior, and especially violent" (Wingfield 2009, 10). Given such "controlling images" the meanings associated with gun use by black men are very different than that of the "ideal gun user" propagated by groups like the NRA. For example, in an analysis of the media outcry over black NBA players' gun ownership David J. Leonard (2010, 257) writes that in the hands of black athletes, "Guns merely become a signifier of the danger, the lack of discipline, and purported pathology of black athletes."

There are many consequences to controlling images of black men as criminals. Black drivers are much more likely to be stopped for minor traffic violations and to have their vehicles searched, a phenomenon known as "driving while black" (Harris 1999). In New York City police regularly utilize a tactic known as "stop and frisk" in which they stop, question, and frisk people who have not committed any crimes. There were over 680,000 such incidents in 2011 and 87 percent of those stopped were black and/or Latino (Taylor 2012). In addition to having disproportionate levels of contact with the police, black and Latino men are more likely to be sentenced, convicted, and to receive harsher sentences than white men even for the same crimes and with similar criminal histories (Reiman and Leighton 2010).

The Significance of Whiteness

As a system of meanings that construct common sense about race, whiteness operates very differently than blackness. Whiteness is defined, to a great extent, by its absence of definition, and by "covert processes that reproduce racial privilege" (Lewis 2004, 626). Whiteness is "racial domination normalized" (Desmond and Emirbayer 2010, 38), and this is particularly evident when the relationship between whiteness and crime is analyzed. While the extent to which whites link blackness to criminality is well-documented in the crime literature, the significance of such beliefs for meanings of whiteness has rarely been addressed. Yet it is critical to explore how ideas about blackness are used to shore-up meanings of whiteness. For example, Amanda Lewis (2004, 636) says that the flipside of the criminalblackman is the "innocent white," who does not need to overtly be invoked to nevertheless represent white anxiety. One way to

understand the significance of whiteness in discussions of crime is to consider whether black crime is constructed as problematic for its consequences to black people and black communities or because of the fear it produces for whites.

Though race is a "fundamentally relational concept" (Desmond and Emibrayer 2010, 38), whiteness is often difficult to identify because it operates as a commonsense, background assumption, against which other racial meanings are produced. This is what is meant by the notion of hegemonic whiteness (Lewis 2004). Whiteness is often only identifiable when failed versions emerge at the intersection of race and class, for example, with terms like "redneck" and "hillbilly" (Hartigan 2005). Though whiteness is not often identified, especially by those who are racially white, it often operates as "subtext," particularly when people attempt to make sense of inequality by invoking "color-blindness" and utilizing discourses of individualism (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Lewis 2004). As Lewis (2004, 636) explains, "Color-blindness is a variant of the tradition of liberal individualism that denies the reality of groups and group based privileges/penalties thereby obscuring relations of domination."

To pay attention to whiteness as subtext is to analyze how race is invoked to understand racial difference. For example, in one study that examines the relationship between white beliefs in "black values" and punitive crime policies, the authors find that "Blacks are perceived to violate, more than Whites, traditional American values such as self-reliance, the work ethic, and respect for authority" (Green, Staerkle, and Sears 2006, 438). What remains underemphasized in these accounts is the notion that "traditional American values" are discursively associated with whiteness. Joe Feagin and Eileen

O'Brien (2003, 12) refer to this as the "cultural superiority perspective" according to which white Americans "have different and better values, customs, families, or communities than African Americans and many other Americans of color."

The significance of these dynamics to the social construction of whiteness has been under-theorized. While the construction of self is always a part of the dynamic in defining "the other" in a society in which groups are understood through binary constructions (Hill Collins 2000), the extent to which the condemnation of "black culture" is tied to the privileging of "white culture" is unclear, particularly given that whiteness has no readily identifiable content (Dyer 1997). Nevertheless, the vilification of "black culture" by many whites is as much about social constructions of blackness as it is about whiteness, the question is, how? Feagin, Vera, and Batur (2001, 26) utilize the term "sincere fictions" to explain these dynamics. They write that "Prejudices and related discriminatory practices reflect an internal representation of oneself as well as of those held in contempt or hated as the 'other.' In the process of developing this self-definition, whites have created a set of 'sincere fictions'—personal and group constructions that reproduce societal myths at the individual and group level." What are these sincere fictions? And what do they say about whiteness?

In the following chapter, I utilize a critical race perspective to understand how respondents understand crime and their desires to be armed in public. I pay particular attention to how racialized discourses are used by respondents to understand crime. This analysis is focused on the dynamic between "self" and "other" that emerges when respondents explain difference. I not only pay attention to moments when respondents

evoke race, I also pay attention to those moments where racialized discourses are used, even in the absence of explicitly raced language.

Constructing the "Good Guy"

One of the binaries that the concealed handgun licensing instructors I interviewed emphasize is that license holders are fundamentally different than those people who carry a gun without the legal right to do so. They suggest this is the case because the licensing process is expensive and time-consuming and proves that they do not have a criminal record. Susan says, "The point of the concealed carry is, you're having more people going through stringent background checks, knowing that they're out there carrying legally. These are the cream of the crop of our community. It should make you feel better. Because then the bad guys know that there's more of the good guys carrying that know better, that know the law, that are stand up people that aren't gonna tolerate ill behavior." Another example comes from David, a sixty-six year old CHL instructor. During our interview he stated many times that he "puts a lot of faith" in the background check because it ensures that an applicant will be denied a license if they have ever committed a felony in their lifetime; if they have committed a class A or B misdemeanor in the previous five years; or if they have ever been convicted of disorderly conduct or domestic violence. Jack says, "That's always a point that I make with my clients is that, we're the good guys."

In addition to the legal restrictions that prevent people with a criminal history from obtaining a CHL, it is a costly endeavor. Indeed, some respondents mentioned that they put off getting a CHL until they could afford it. In Texas, CHL courses typically

cost around $100 and the state fee is $140. Though he does not directly connect this to the cost of the course, David celebrates the fact that most of his students are college-educated professionals. David says, "Fortunately I don't see too many, what you might consider bubba types coming to class. Yesterday I taught a class, I had five. I had one pastor. The other four were high tech individuals…everybody's college educated." When I asked David to elaborate on what he means by "bubba types" he says, "if it's somebody that shows me…they have a lot of racial prejudice…or…if something in our conversation would lead you to believe that maybe they have the mindset that they need to go form a militia." In using such constructs, David is distancing himself and his students from poor whites, people on whom he can displace racial prejudice and anti-social behavior. He suggests that his students are good candidates to carry a gun in public, in part because they are professionals and college-educated. David uses "bubba types" to construct a preferred version of middle-class whiteness by marking "failed whiteness" (Hartigan 2005), and he uses this construct to legitimize CHLs as a whole.

This discourse was clearest in my discussion with John, a 44 year old CHL advanced firearm and self-defense instructor. John describes the differences between those who come to him for training and what he describes as "the criminal class." John says, "what I expect you're gonna find is a recurring theme that our behavior patterns are different from the criminal class." He says whereas criminals think about "what can I steal, rob, how can I get paid today?" CHL holders are professional and upstanding. John elaborates,

> It's more people that are established in their careers, and their lives and their family and their community. Guys that are Boy Scout pack leaders and…soccer and baseball [coaches], and they're PTA members. What I tell people is, you know, my students are the kind of people that are gonna pull over if there's a car accident on the highway. They're gonna pull over and see if they can help. They're not just gonna drive by. They're the ones that have the first aid kits in their car; the ones that are gonna stop and render aid; the ones that are volunteer fire department members. They are the ones that are out there being an active member of the community, contributing and doing what they can.

John's explanation of the types of people who get CHLs makes it clear that he sees them primarily as *men* who are good citizens. It seems clear from these descriptions that the "good guy" is literally a man; masculinity is hegemonic in these accounts, as it operates as a "common sense," background assumption that frames how those I interviewed imagine CHL holders.

Because he sees those with a license in such a positive light, John says that it "irritates" him that there are laws that restrict where a CHL holder can carry his or her gun. John says "It's a personality issue. If you're mentally and emotionally squared away to where you can handle it, then it doesn't really matter where you are or what you're doing or who you're around."

The people I interviewed suggest that the licensing process creates a pool of "good citizens" who should not be subjected to restrictions to their handgun carrying practices, such as those that exist in "gun free zones." Most respondents criticized gun free zones because, to paraphrase Bill, "bad guys don't read signs." For example, when I asked Adam his views on gun free zones he said,

> I think it's kind of a joke. Because when you're posting a gun free zone in a school, well then, whose gonna have the guns in the school? The bad guys;

> the guys who are, you know, bringing them there illegally anyway. Right? I mean people who don't go buy their guns and register them and get concealed handgun license. Just guys who are…for lack of a better word, bad guys, right?

Both Gil and Barbara have printed business cards that are intended to be handed out to store owners who prohibit guns in their establishments. The cards state that (among other things) as a CHL holder, the person passing out the card has no history of criminal conduct or mental illness and asks, "Can you say that about your *other* customers?" Interestingly, Gil and Barbara both say they have never actually handed the cards to anyone who operates a business in a building that is "posted." Both respondents suggested they would not be willing to be confrontational with a store owner, but that they heartily agree with the sentiments of the card and cannot fathom why they would be prohibited from carrying their guns into "gun free" zones.

Illustration D: "No Gun, No Money" Card. This is an example of the types of cards some CHL holders have printed to pass out to businesses that are posted with signs that would make it illegal for someone to carry a gun on their premises.

When CHL holders justify why they should have the right to carry a firearm in public, they often rely on the licensing process as proof that they are not criminals, and as such will not use their firearms illegally. In this discourse, CHL holders put themselves in contrast to a criminal "other" against whom their goodness and moral right is established. Many CHL holders cannot understand why someone would want them to be unarmed in their business. Susan explains her perspective on gun free zones as follows, "I feel that everybody knows that nobody in there is armed, so that would be a good place to come and do something. You know, like Taco Cabana that

has the big 'no gun' sign, we don't go sit inside Taco Cabana, because basically it's telling everybody 'nobody in here should have guns, so come on in and rob us.'" Susan says that although such signs are well-intended, "They don't realize the message they're sending to the bad guys. They're telling the good guys, 'we don't want your business' and they're telling the bad guys, 'come on in and rob us cause it's easy pickings.'"

While some say they respect a business' right to refuse service to anyone and do not see restrictions as a reason to not shop at an establishment, others say that they will not support businesses that refuse to honor their right to carry in public. An example of this latter view comes from Mike who told me about a time he was shopping for a wedding anniversary present for his wife. He says he stopped at a jewelry store and noticed as he approached that the store was posted with a "30.06 sign," which indicates that firearms are not allowed on the premises. Mike explains that he went back to his truck to put his gun in his console and re-entered the store. He says,

> [I] went in and I looked at what they had. And I went, "This is really nice, I like this. It's exactly what I'm lookin for. You guys have a sign on the front door that says that I don't have the right to defend myself. And you're in Texas. [laughs]. What are your thoughts on that?" And the lady, she actually engaged me in conversation and said, "Well you know, that's a corporate policy? Uh…and up until like two weeks ago?" She said, "We always had armed security at the front." Oh, well I can understand why a corporate office would make that decision if you're gonna pay for armed security. So why did the armed security leave? She said, "Uh, it was too much of an expense." I said, "But the sign's still up. So now, you've got an open target here with *all* this jewelry. No armed guard and no armed citizen to defend against a robber." She said, "Huh? I guess. Okay." "Well if you ever get that policy changed, I'll buy this ring. In the meantime, I appreciate you talkin." And I bought it from somewhere else. Even though they had the best price and the best looking band. I'm not gonna support a company that's gonna strip me of my ability to defend myself.

Mike explains that what makes the "gun free zone" policy problematic is that he is unable to defend himself while he is in the jewelry store. And yet, instead of simply leaving, and finding a store where he is allowed to bring his gun inside (or shopping online), he puts his gun in his truck and returns to the store. Many respondents who are very concerned about crime will simply carry their firearm into a place where they feel threatened but nevertheless want to patronize. But as Mike does above, some decide to stake a claim in larger struggle that some CHL holders feel is at stake when they are subjected to "liberal gun policies." Such protest statements are an attempt to make sure that their views are well-known, in the hopes that "gun free" establishments will change their policies.

While a few of the people I interviewed said that they are not bothered by businesses that post gun free signs, most respondents say that they refuse to shop in such establishments, and a few respondents are actively involved in working to get businesses to change their "no guns" policies through letter-writing campaigns and boycotts. Arguments against "gun free zones" hinge on discursively constructing CHL holders as "good guys." Though a clean criminal history is part of this dynamic, it is also clear that the notion that CHL holders are "the cream of the crop" of a community is tied to much larger understandings of moral goodness. This construct not only puts CHL holders in a positive light, it also helps them to make the case that they *should* be armed, and they *should* have access to any and all establishments.

When "Good Guys" Carry Illegally

Though most respondents emphasized that CHL holders are different than other people because they insist on doing things "by the book," a handful of people I interviewed admitted to carrying their firearms illegally. Their descriptions of such incidents clashed with their insistence that "bad guys" are "bad" in part because they carry firearms illegally.

One of the first interviews in which a respondent offered that they have carried a gun illegally was with Mike, who was adamant about the distinctions between criminals and CHL holders. Mike says, "I'm a very 'do it legally' kind of guy. Which I think that most CHL guys are." Mike explains that if a person is willing to go through the hassle of a CHL course, they are likely law-abiding. He says, "You don't get people to sit through this…friggin class and pay all that money and go to the range and show that you can shoot, reasonably well from people who don't have a respect for the law. Those people, they're gonna carry whether they have this or not." Later in the interview Mike said that he will not carry his firearm into a place that is posted as "gun free" because it is against the law.

Despite his belief in the firm distinctions between law breakers and law abiders, when describing places where he cannot carry his firearm, Mike says, "Work won't let me, and you know, because I follow the law, and follow the rules, as much as possible, I don't carry at work. There [were] two times that I did. What happened? Something happened about five years ago, [and] I brought my gun with me to work [for] two days in a briefcase." This example shows how at the very same

time that Mike insists that he is law-abiding, he describes breaking the law. This distinction is important not because Mike actually has criminal intent; instead, it reveals that Mike does not actually follow the rules to the degree that he suggests, and moreover, he is able to rationalize his law-breaking behavior because he is a "good guy."

Another example comes from Krysti, who regularly carried a gun before obtaining a CHL. She was particularly interested in being armed while jogging in a public park. Once when Krysti was at her parent's house, she decided to borrow one of her dad's handguns. When I asked Krysti if she knew that without a CHL she was carrying the firearm illegally, she said, "yes," and seemed to be embarrassed by this fact. I told her that she was not the first person I had interviewed who had admitted to carrying a gun without a license and so she need not feel bad. Krysti laughed and said that if caught, she would not feel bad, and in a voice that suggested she was feigning ignorance, "I'd be like, 'Oops! I didn't know you had to have a license!'" It seemed clear that Krysti assumed that as a woman, she could claim ignorance about the law. What is unremarked upon, but nevertheless significant, is that she assumes that she would be presumed innocent and naive and not counted among those "criminals" who carry guns illegally.

When I asked Krysti if she knew that she was carrying illegally, she said, "Yeah. I did know. I didn't care. My thought was, yes, I need a license; I'm supposed to have a license. But my safety is [my] priority." Because she had carried a firearm illegally before obtaining a CHL, I asked her why she would go through the

trouble of getting a license. Krysti said, "Because it's the law. Everyone should obey the law." "Are you worried about getting caught?" I asked. Krysti responded, "No. You have to give 'em a reason to get caught."

The respondents I interviewed who admit to carrying a gun illegally were all white. And they all either explicitly explained or inferred that the only time they would ever be caught with a gun is if they had to use it to defend themselves. In this way, they are able to rely on the fact that their whiteness does not carry with it the stigma of criminality that people of color endure. They are not likely to be "stopped and frisked" as they navigate their daily lives. White women may be particularly likely to carry a firearm illegally. Because they are most often imagined as victims, and not perpetrators (Madriz 1997), they may rightly assume that any police officers they come into contact with will not presume they are armed. Thus, one of the advantages of whiteness is that white people can get away with more crimes than people of color; because they are assumed to follow the law, they are less likely to be caught when they break the law.

THE VISIBLE BAD GUY

As part of the interview process, I asked respondents to explain how they make decisions about whether to carry a gun and to describe times when they felt threatened when they did and did not have a gun with them. The stories that emerged from answers to these questions suggest that race is a central organizing principle in how those I interviewed imagine threat. This happens slightly differently for men and women, and this difference speaks to how gender is implicated in the social construction of

vulnerability. Consequently, I have divided the discussion below. I first analyze men's responses and then women's.

Dangerous Neighborhoods

When I asked the men I interviewed how they make decisions about whether or not to carry a gun, eleven said they carry a gun wherever it is legally allowed and nine said they make decisions based on where they are going. For example, they will carry a firearm if they go somewhere they have never been; if they are traveling out of town; or if they go to a part of town with a reputation for being dangerous. "Bad parts of town" were always marked as areas with high poverty and often, though not always explicitly, as areas that are predominantly black or Latino. When I asked Adam if he regularly carries a gun he said no, because he now lives in a safe city. Adam sets this in contrast to his experiences growing up in Houston, parts of which he describes as a "war zone." Adam says he always carries a gun when he travels to Houston, because unlike his current city, where the "bad parts of town" are relegated to one side of the city and the "nice" parts of town are on the other, Houston isn't "zoned." Adam says his friends who live in Houston carry their firearms daily because:

> The gas station right down the street is totally different than the gas station one mile down the road. I mean you can have the one that's right by your house is fine and you've got no problems, there's no people hanging out there drinkin' beer and acting crazy. But you decide not to go to that one and you just drive down the street and all of a sudden it's like, you know, Compton down there.

Adam invokes "Compton" as a euphemism for race; it is code for a space he sees as predominantly poor, black, dangerous, and scary. Like many white Americans, Adam

links blackness with criminality (Collins 2006; Feagin 2010; Russell 2009). Because of Houston's uncertain racial landscape, Adam feels compelled to be armed.

Respondents' perceptions of danger were often loaded with similarly racialized notions of criminality and vulnerability. For example Jack, a 46 year old CHL instructor, blames Hurricane Katrina evacuees from New Orleans for what he perceives to be a steady increase in violent crime in Texas. Jack carries at least one gun on him whenever possible. When I asked him if he has ever had the occasion to use his gun he told the following story:

> I got lost and ended up in a predominantly black neighborhood. [A man in] an old beat-up truck in front of me was driving around and he stops…in the middle of the road where I couldn't go around him. And he gets out, so I pulled my weapon out and put it right where he couldn't see it just below the door. Rolled my window down about an inch and he comes back and he asks me some stupid question about how to the get to the freeway and I told him, "don't know, can't help you." And he's like, thanks, God bless you, or something, gets in his truck and leaves. I don't know if that was legitimate or what, but I wasn't going to take the chance.

Explanations of threat that link perceived criminality to black men create a "racialized fear of crime" (Davis 2007) whereby feelings of vulnerability are heightened when whites make contact with the racial Other. Jack is able to use his firearm to quell this sense of vulnerability, and to protect himself should the need arise.

When I asked Adam if he has ever had a situation where he thought he might have to use his gun he says, "Let's say you pull up to a convenience store and there's some certain people outside that make you feel a little nervous. Then you've got your gun there." Later Adam elaborates, "You pull up and there's, you know, three guys out there, gangster guys, just kind of hanging around at midnight in front of the convenience

store...So you make your decision: Do I leave? Or do I protect myself?...So when it's just you outside and them outside, you know, I would just kind of grab my gun and stick it in the back of my pants and pump my gas and be on my way." The use of the term "gangster" coupled with his previous comment about "Compton" suggests that Adam is describing encountering a group of black men. He feels threatened by this group, unsure if he should get out of his car. By putting a gun in his waistband, he does not let his fear of the criminal other restrict his behavior; he does not shirk from whatever conflict he imagines might ensue.

Another example comes from Mike, 36. We met at a café in a predominantly white, upper-middleclass part of town. Despite claims that he carries wherever he can, Mike was not carrying a firearm when we met; he had left it in his truck. As we talked he said, "I don't feel strange sitting here and not having it. I think if I did have it, it would probably make me a little bit more aware of my surroundings." I was taken aback by this comment, having assumed that the power a firearm bestows would allow a person to relax. Mike explains,

> When I have it with me, I'm paying a lot more attention to people…somebody walks in, looks like they're lookin' for trouble. Somebody that doesn't fit. You know, not to play the, uh, race card or anything, but there aren't too many black people around here. So if you…walk into a place and you don't really fit in. Like if I went over to [a predominantly black part of town] and walked into Martin Luther King, Jr., church on Sunday morning, I'm betting I'd be one of the few white guys. And people would probably look at me and go, well what's this white guy doing here?

Mike's explanation of how race factors into the way he imagines risk is cloaked in discourses of "color blind racism" (Bonilla-Silva 2001). Equating the experience of a

black man being seen as a potential criminal to him being seen as oddly out of place in a church minimizes racial inequality. Yet race plays a profound role in how Mike imagines risk. In this predominantly white space Mike feels safe enough to not bother bringing his gun in; however, he suggests this safety could be disrupted if a black man were to come into the store.

Three of the four men in my sample who identified as Hispanic/Latino did not differ dramatically from the rest of the sample in how they talked about the link between race and crime. For instance, Joseph, a 45 year-old CHL holder who identifies as white on forms, but says that his father is Hispanic, explained that he used his "Hispanic appearance" to intimidate others when he lived in a high crime neighborhood that was predominantly black and Latino. He said that looking "pure white" would have made him a target. The only person in the sample who resisted racist constructions of threat was George, a 44 year-old CHL instructor who is Mexican-American and lives in a predominantly Hispanic city along the Texas-Mexico border. He says that he grew up with guys who are now involved in the drug trade and that he tries to not have a "black and white" view of who is a threat. George says, "Some of the nicest guys I know…have tattoos from [head to toe]. Some of the meanest guys I know are the stereotypical middle-aged…white male professionals [who are] hot-headed, hot-tempered, on edge, on the defense all the time." Of the twenty men I interviewed, George was the only one who troubled the relationship between race, perceptions of criminality, and threat. It is significant that George was the only person interviewed who was reared and currently

lives in a region that is not predominantly white/Anglo. It seems his perceptions of criminality were not developed according to the white racial frame (Feagin 2010).

R. W. Connell (1995, 80) writes that, "In a white supremacist context, Black masculinities play symbolic roles for white gender construction." In this case, many of the men I interviewed identified black men and areas of town marked as poor and predominantly black or Latino as threatening. Indeed, race is conflated with social class, such that Mike sees it as impossible that a black man would have a legitimate reason to enter a café in a wealthy part of town.

It is significant that in the above descriptions of fear-inducing events none of the respondents describe being physically confronted or overtly threatened by the black men they encounter. Instead they report that simply coming into contact with black men induces a desire to be armed, and compels the men I interviewed to have their guns ready. They project violence, aggression, and criminal intent onto the black men they encounter. These characterizations are a form of "gendered racism" that are used both to "validate inequality [and] also to contrast black masculinity with white masculinity as a hegemonic ideal" (Harvey-Wingfield 2007, 198).

The men I interviewed are not threatened when the person they encounter black people, it is specifically black *males* that are identified as threatening. Having constructed a sense of self that relies on identifying as a "good guy," someone who *should* carry a gun, the men I interviewed construct their sense of masculinity in contradistinction to what black masculinity represents to them: they presume the men they see are criminals, thus they are armed in defense. They imagine the men they see

will be violent, thus they are prepared to respond. Whiteness is critical to these dynamics not because these men see it as an evident marker of status, but because (to them) whiteness signifies nothing at all.

How Women Imagine Threat

The fact that women are primarily armed to defend themselves from men was clear when they talked about guns as equalizers. However, most often this fact operated as a common sense, background assumption and was not overtly explained. For example, it was common for respondents to describe hypothetical threatening scenarios by saying things like, "If *he* wants to hurt me…" Women were never described as threatening, except for when Mary suggested that sophisticated criminals will sometimes use women as decoys because people are less likely to be vigilant when approached by a woman they do not know than when approached by a man.

As I argued above, some of the men I interviewed used racialized understandings of threat to make decisions about whether or not to carry a gun. While some of the women I interviewed evoked race to discuss moments when they felt threatened, their sense of threatening spaces and people operates slightly differently than it does for the men. Aside from the four women who say they carry a firearm whenever it is legally allowed, most of the women report little consistency in their gun carrying practices. Ten women report that they carry a gun only sometimes, and one woman said she never carries her gun. Nearly all of the women say that they carry a gun when they are driving long distances, particularly when they are alone. But I could not identify a pattern that

would consistently explain how the women make decisions about whether to carry a gun with them in public in their everyday lives.

Though racialized spaces do not seem to provoke in women the need to carry a firearm, there were two points at which race was explicitly used to identify people who were perceived as threatening. Interviews with Ruth and Caroline included moments where the women identify race when describing moments where they felt vulnerable. The example from Caroline was discussed in an earlier chapter, when she believed she was marked as a victim by a "Mexican gang" while shopping at the mall. The only other time race was explicitly mentioned was when Ruth described a time that she and her husband were sightseeing in a National Park in Colorado. While in the park, they pulled into a rest area so that Ruth could take photos. Neither Ruth nor her husband was armed. What is interesting in Ruth's explanation of events is the way that she struggles to explain the scenario as she tries to avoid using racist language. Ruth says,

> Well, there was this car with like four…um [pause] youth guys. They weren't white, Caucasian, they were various [pause] a little darker skinned I guess. Dressed in really baggy [clothes], casual like, with their shirt off and stuff like that. And they were, all of a sudden, they blocked the exit and two of them were out of the car. Luckily my husband had enough sense about him to say something's not right here. And he's yelling at me, "Ruth, get in the car, get in the car!" And um, I'm like huh, huh? And then I come back and he looks around at them and those guys are like trying to, I think they wanted to rob us or something. And so my husband had the wits about him to back up and back out the entrance. And uh, that was scary. After I started registering in my mind what was happening and he even started thinking more about what was happening. I wish we had a gun with us. Of course at that time you weren't allowed to carry in national parks. I think you are now. So we went to the visitor's center and told the people, but they were probably gone by then. That was a time when I kind of wished. I would've felt better if I had had one. What if I couldn't get out the entrance or something, and they were confronting us? There was two of us and four of them.

Race is important in this explanation because it seems to be tied to Ruth's sense that the men had criminal intentions. Though it is not clear if the men Ruth encountered were trying to harm her, she believes that they were.

Like Caroline's story about being marked in a mall by a Mexican gang, Ruth uses race to make sense of the intentions of a group of men she encounters. What is important is that in none of my interviews (with men or women) did a respondent identify a potentially threatening person and explain that they were white. Presumably, at least one of the respondents has felt threatened by someone who was not a person of color. Perhaps when respondents describe threatening situations and do not mention race, they are talking about white people who made them feel vulnerable. Though it is impossible to determine this, using race to identify threatening people when they are people of color, but not when they are white, is a part of the process of the racialization of crime. Whiteness remains unmarked and, consequently, irrelevant, while blackness or "Mexican-ness" is a central part of the story of vulnerability. Though only two women explicitly used race in this way, many more used more subtle, racialized discourses.

School Shooters and Gang Members

There are generally two groups that the women I interviewed identify as potential sources of threat: gang members and people who are mentally ill. The ways in which these groups are parsed reflect underlying beliefs about the meanings of race. Mental illness is most often used to explain instances like the Columbine shooting in 1999 in which two young white men killed twelve classmates and a teacher before ultimately

killing themselves. The three women I interviewed who are teachers all say that they wish they could carry their firearms at work because of the threat of school shootings. For example, Krysti says, "Because there [are] too many situations that have happened to where, you know, you get some crazy kid that wants to come in and shoot up the school, and he comes to shoot me and I'm defenseless."

Susan spoke at some length about how people need to take more responsibility for their self-defense because she believes that there is a growing number of mentally ill children and adults who have access to firearms. I asked Susan if when she imagines threat she is most concerned about people who are mentally ill. "I think so," she said. Because there were various times during our interview when she referred to needing a gun to defend herself from "bad guys," I asked Susan to identify who the "bad guys" are. She responded,

> You have your gang members. Who…for whatever reason, culturally, that's what they do. Now you can say it was because they were poor, you can say it's because they live, you know…on the East Side, you can say, you know, whatever. But at some point it's a choice. At some point it's culturally acceptable, because it's happening in those communities. I mean there are white, Hispanic and black gang members out there, you can't, you know, Chinese whatever. You can't just say it's one race that's doing all of it. There's corruption among all of it because you've got the drugs, you've got the money, you've got low self-esteem, you know whatever they didn't do in school, whatever. But, you have a momma come on the TV and say, "Oh, my kid was so good," when he has a rap sheet this long [holds up her fingers indicating over 2 inches], I'm sorry, is bullshit. And you as a parent at some point have to take responsibility for not moving, not doing better, not, whatever. You know I'm not going to say that I know the situation for all those people and why they don't move to the better areas. We all do the best we can, but you know what, there's people like me in middle class America that go out and shoot up schools. And that are not part of gang members, you know, so you've got some level of, wherever they are, the social standing, they're hearing I'm not good enough, I'm not smart enough, I don't have opportunity. At every level, kids are hearing the same thing.

I quote Susan's explanation at length because it is a useful example of how race and class combine to construct perceptions of criminality for many of the people I interviewed. First, Susan splits threatening groups into poor gang members and middle-class kids responsible for school shootings (given her comments about the gang member's mom on television, it seems that in both instances, she is referring to young adults). Considering the comments that preceded this long quote, Susan assumes that the kids responsible for school shootings have a mental illness. Indeed, she goes on to explain that her son has autism and is often depressed about his inability to make friends. She feels that as a parent, it is her responsibility to ensure that he does not ever get ahold of her guns, should he consider taking them to school.

Though she frames her answer in "color-blind language," Susan's explanation of criminality in poor neighborhoods draws upon racialized discourses. She says that gangs can consist of members from any racial category, yet she identifies a part of town that is known for being predominantly black and Latino to make her point. Furthermore, when Susan says, "it's culturally acceptable because it's happening in *those* communities," Susan is distancing how she sees herself from the "other." This is reinforced when she makes a point that is ostensibly anti-racist: *even middle-class people like me* shoot up schools. Further, there are consequences to the way she distinguishes the mentally ill from gang members: she assumes that a gang member from a poor area is representative of a cultural deficiency—the entire community is to blame for his failing—whereas a mentally ill middle-class kid has a personal struggle. Indeed, Susan says, "You can't go

out and blame these kids or these people when they do things out of mental illness if nobody has stepped up to help them." She does not blame "middle-class culture" for the school shootings; and she does not mark the areas of town where "those types of kids" usually come from. In this construct blackness is implied and vilified while whiteness remains an unmarked category.

The distinction between (white) people with mental illness and (non-white) gang members was also apparent in my interview with Caroline. As you may recall, Caroline's husband Hank was present during our interview, and there were a number of times when Hank seemed surprised by some of Caroline's answers to questions. For example, when Caroline described ways in which the world has changed since she was younger, she mentioned that one source of threat is gangs in schools. She explains, "I was a school nurse in a poor part [of town]. And a lot of those kids grew up to be gang members. And as much as those kids liked me, I would still be in danger from them." Hank, a former principal at the same school, seemed shocked by this suggestion, "You think so?" he asked. "Oh, gosh, yes," said Caroline. Hank suggested that, "Maybe those that are kind of sick. But not just," when Caroline interrupted to say, "True gang members? Oh yes, I think they [would] absolutely have no problem. Although some have come out of…the gang. And they've been very, very respectful around me. But I would still be very careful. Yeah, I wouldn't be foolish." While Hank suggests that only a mentally ill person—gang member or otherwise—would be a danger, Caroline emphasizes that "true gang members" posed a threat to her security.

Among the women I interviewed, only one seemed to have a certain degree of ambivalence about the way she sees criminals. You might remember from an earlier chapter that Catherine was threatened and stalked by a contractor and decided to get a CHL after many months of feeling helpless. Ultimately her views on criminals changed and she decided that she wanted the ability to carry a firearm in public. When I asked her what compelled this shift, she said, "When I decided that even though I didn't think that killing someone was the right thing to do, I realized that [pause] we're all animals at the most basic level. Like we all really want to survive. You know? So, whatever ethical, religious, moral, spiritual, societal convictions we have, I mean, even the most passive person, even the person who claims to be a pacifist, if you were to hold their head under water would fight back…to try to get a breath."

Later Catherine elaborated on her views and said, "I don't want someone else who is a criminal to be able to deprive me of, you know, life, liberty, pursuit of happiness, all that good stuff; as cheesy as it sounds." She said that when she was younger she thought of her life and the lives of others as equally important, but that now, "I'm not sure that I feel that way now. Because to me? My life is most important." She says that in general, her view of criminals has changed significantly. "I've just become extremely intolerant of people who are criminals." As soon as Catherine said that she followed it with "Although, I say that, but I have a kid in this class that's in [a drug cartel] and we're buddies. I don't know. He hangs out after school to talk to me about what he should do with his life. And….so [laughs]…I guess I'm, I'm intolerant of it unless I [pause]. Really, I don't know. I don't know how to describe that. It's, it's, I don't know."

Catherine's feelings are unresolved. Catherine says that she had to develop a sense that she has the right to defend herself, even if this means fatally shooting someone. While she feels like her view of potential criminals has fundamentally changed, when discussing her student, Catherine is deeply ambivalent.

The distinction between gang members and mentally ill school shooters is an important one in how the women I interviewed imagine threat. Whereas gang members are seen as a byproduct of cultural deficiency, school shooters are labeled "mentally ill" and are not seen as a reflection of the cultural values of their neighborhoods. The implication is that gang members are wholly responsible for their behaviors and should not be helped. Such characterizations shut off empathy and reinforce the construction of the "the other." Catherine, who has a relationship with a student who would otherwise be defined as the "criminal other," seems to struggle with this characterization when applying it to someone she knows personally.

Creating Criminals

As is evident from my interviews, perceptions of criminality are laden with racialized tropes. When I asked Lisa if she has a sense for what motivates the types of criminals she is protecting herself from she said "Entitlement," and then elaborated: "We've almost glamorized…criminal activity." Then in a voice that suggested she was mocking this type of person she said, "'I'm a big time criminal… I'm a gangsta." I asked Lisa if she meant that we glamorize criminals in popular culture and she responded, "Absolutely! Absolutely, totally in pop culture. It's cool you know!" Lisa continued, "You've got kids all over the place that they think they can just pick up a gun. It's part of

being in a gang…They're entitled and they get to use it however, whenever to commit [a] crime. There's a complete lack of respect for the law." Though Lisa never explicitly mentions race, her explanation is loaded with racialized discourses of black criminality including her use of the term "gangsta." Importantly, Lisa criticizes popular culture representations for "glamorizing" criminality, but she also seems to rely upon those same representations in her understanding of crime. Thus, Lisa is drawing on discursive constructions of blackness in popular culture rather than on experiences she has had with crime in her own life. This is one of the consequences of media representations of the criminalblackman: media and real life become blurred.

As Lisa's explanation of what motivates criminals continued, she explained that she believes that crime is "a societal problem." She continues, "I think it would stop…if we eliminated entitlements. If we truly prosecuted criminals and held them accountable and did not make it, you know, an easy thing, if you will." Though Lisa did not clarify which entitlements she was referring to, it seems clear that she does not see benefits for retired people as the problem. Lisa said that entitlements make people believe that "You owe me and I deserve that. And you know, who are you, you're privileged; I get to take from you. And there is that whole mentality of…distribution… You've got it; I'm going to take it." Though Lisa was the only person who directly linked criminality to entitlements, many respondents explained that crime is primarily perpetrated by people who do not want to work to get what they want. For example when I asked Caroline if she had a sense for what motivates the criminals she is armed against she said, "I think they're lazy. [Laughs]. Get off your ass and get a job!"

Though these discourses are not inevitably about race, for some respondents they are clearly racialized. While Lisa traces criminal behavior to government entitlement programs (programs that were not specified), she also explains that this dysfunctional behavior is rooted in the breakdown of the American family. She says, "We have lost in especially in some of the minority cultures, we don't have that father figure. We don't have family values that raise responsible adults. And when you don't raise responsible adults, they're susceptible to gangs, to other influences." Lisa's sense that criminality is concentrated in "minority cultures" reveals that her belief in the link between entitlements and dysfunction is primarily concentrated in racial / ethnic minority communities. She invokes the "culture of poverty" discourse to explain what she sees as the link between poverty, family structure, welfare dependency, and criminal behavior. According to Edward Royce (2009, 52), proponents of the culture of poverty thesis believe that "The welfare system rewards the poor for not working, for not marrying, and for having babies out of wedlock." Moreover, "It undermines personal responsibility, saps individual initiative, and fosters an ethos of dependency." Such characterizations of the "undeserving poor" are highly racialized in the United States, as this is precisely how many white Americans characterize African-American poverty (Gilens 1999). It seems clear from Lisa's explanation that she sees criminal behavior as one consequence of the "culture of poverty" and that this is a problem that is concentrated in "minority communities."

Lisa says that these situations are made worse by a criminal justice system that is over-burdened and does not adequately prosecute criminals. She said that this "creates an

'I can get away with it' attitude and so their crimes tend to escalate, I believe. I really do. Whether it starts with the petty theft or drugs or what have you. Um, but I do think they have the upper-hand because we're not enforcing the law and when you can get away with it, guess what you're going to keep doing? Doing it!" Lisa says that she believes that we have "allowed lawlessness to rule." Lisa explains, "There's a complete lack of respect for the law. I mean it's evident in everything we do…For example illegal immigration, which is off topic, but it's a perfect analysis of [this]. What part of illegal don't you understand?"

A belief that "lawlessness" is allowed to rule was offered by many of the people I interviewed. For example, Paul says that society has become more lax in enforcing laws because people excuse criminal behavior. In a mocking tone, Paul says, "Oh, but they had a hard life." Then he elaborates,

> It doesn't mean the guy down the street didn't have just as hard a life, but he's working four jobs to make it work. This guy decides to take from somebody else because that is what was easiest for him. Not because they couldn't work. It was just because that was easier in his mind than it was to actually work. You know, if the punishment was great enough, if the punishment was such a deterrent than there wouldn't be a [belief] of, oh yeah, maybe I should just go rob this place instead of goin' out and getting four jobs.

Paul perceives that there is a tendency to excuse criminal behavior and to suggest that people should not be held personally responsible for their actions. He believes that as a consequence of these attitudes, crime persists.

The notion that society contributes to a crime problem by discouraging personal responsibility was by no means universal among the people I interviewed; however, it is what some identified as a fundamental element in the constellation of factors that make

CHLs important. Paul, Lisa, Caroline, and others who utilize culture of poverty discourses see the answer to society's problems in a fairly simple way: as a morality tale in which the government meddles in people's lives and, thus, creates a dysfunctional "underclass." While they see their own lives as determined by personal responsibility, they believe that this underclass is conditioned—by welfare dependency and an enabling culture—to feel that they are not personally responsible for their lives. When Paul says that "having a hard life" is no excuse for theft when someone can just get four jobs to make ends meet, he is making a claim about unbridled agency. Such beliefs are a part of a worldview that is shaped by an ideology of individualism according to which, "opportunities in the United States are available for anyone motivated to succeed, economic outcomes are a function of ability and effort, and existing inequalities are fair and inevitable" (Royce 2010, 159). Moreover, such claims associate crime with poverty; criminals are assumed to be poor and the poor are assumed to be criminals. This is a racialized and classed view of crime that renders privileged criminals (e.g. those responsible for white-collar crime), who arguably commit the most consequential and socially damaging of all crimes, invisible (Reiman and Leighton 2010).

Those respondents who believe that society is contributing to a culture of dependency and lawlessness were among the same people who reported that the more law-abiding people who arm themselves, the better off society will be. It seems that respondents invoke "the government"—a term that is never specified—as a stand-in for "the social." Programs perceived to be in the interest of society and legislation that restricts individual freedoms are seen as oppressive threats to liberty, while freedom and

personal responsibility are used interchangeably. This suggests that respondents are drawing upon discourses of neo-liberalism, "which places overwhelming emphasis on individualism, self-reliance and the free market as organizer of all aspects of life" (DeGoede 1996, 351). I would suggest that this is part of the appeal of CHLs: they symbolize for those who have a license that they are the embodiment of personal responsibility.

CHLs and Personal Responsibility

Discourses around control and personal responsibility are at the heart of how the people I interviewed explain the appeal of carrying a concealed firearm. Gil explains, "See everybody's conditioned by society to believe that you call 911 and they're gonna help you." He says that when you ask people why they call 911, they often say that it is because police have guns and can respond to threatening situations. "But," Gil asks, "what are you gonna do in the seven to nine minutes it's gonna take them to get there?" He continues, "[Are] you gonna say to the robber, 'Hey Mr. Robber, hold on a second. Take a time out. The cops will be here in seven to nine minutes and then we'll get back to this.' Or are you gonna be dead by the time the cops get there?" Gil's explanation is partly tied to the common sense understanding that many CHL holders have that average response times are much too slow to rely on the police for help in stopping a violent crime. Evidence bears this out. Though response times vary from city to city, national data compiled by the Bureau of Justice suggest that responses to level one priority calls (violent assaults and homicides) are likely not quick enough to stop a crime in action. In 25 percent of cases, the police reach the scene within one to five minutes; in 28.5 percent

of cases it takes six to ten minutes; and in 37.6 percent of cases it takes police eleven minutes to one hour to reach a crime scene ("Criminal Victimization in the United States" 1995). To cite one example, police in Milwaukee, Wisconsin arrive on the scene of priority one calls an average of fourteen minutes after a call is placed to 911 (Poston 2011).

My analysis suggests that the focus on personal responsibility is not limited to concerns about response time; it is also part of much larger discourses of self-reliance and what is perceived to be government-encouraged dependency. Many of the CHL holders I spoke with explain that in today's world there is a general need for a great degree of personal responsibility. Gil says, "I think you…either adopt an attitude of, I'm gonna depend on society; I'm gonna depend on the government to make sure I'm cool. Or, I'm gonna take responsibility for my own safety and my family's safety." Similarly, John explains that recent events including flooding and terrorism have shown many Americans that there is a need for a greater degree of personal responsibility when it comes to unexpected incidents. John says,

> People have kind of come back around to the idea that you know, 'Gee, I shouldn't just sit on my ass and wait for the people in the uniforms to do stuff. Because they may not get there in time or may not be there.' So it comes back around to this mindset that, I need to take care of myself. I need to have the skills and the equipment, and that's not just guns. First aid, fire, emergency preparation…It's a different mindset in America which is the way it used to be, 50s, 1940s, 1950s…World War II. You know, that changed a generation...Now we've come back around to a certain amount of self-reliance.

Self-reliance was a recurring theme in nearly every interview I conducted, and it was not only mentioned with respect to self-defense. In most cases, concealed handgun licensing

was explained as one facet of a larger self-reliance ethos that respondents believe is less prevalent now than it was in the past.

Many of the people interviewed for this project believe that there is a tendency for too many people to rely on the government during crisis. Wendy, who works in emergency management preparedness says, "I get so frustrated! [Laughs]. In my job we really, really, really get frustrated. And…we walk a fine line because we don't want to turn our backs on people, but at what point do you, do people have to start thinking for themselves? And doing for themselves? Just how much do people expect the government to do for them?" Wendy says that too many people believe that "they're here, they're alive, and government and someone else is responsible for everything that they do. And the more I see that view, the more I don't want to be that person. Ever." Wendy explains that she has taken various measures to ensure that she is self-reliant, including storing reserves of food and obtaining a CHL. She explains that she loved taking the CHL class because, "I was really jazzed to be in a room with like-minded people who were all thinking about self-reliance, self-defense, personal-defense, handguns, that sort of thing."

When I asked Wendy if she has always been like that or if it is something she has developed over time, she said that "we were just raised as, that's what you do. That's what you're supposed to do. That's what's right. And if, you know, God granted you favor and you have extra, you share it with those that don't. But you don't, you're not a co-dependent, you're not an enabler. You know, being generous didn't mean that you gave to the point where that person didn't want to work. You gave to people who were

willing to help themselves but were just down on their luck." Wendy makes clear that she is not dismissing the importance of charity, but she believes that systematic assistance can lead to dysfunction. Similarly, Susan says that government policies are fostering a culture of dependency that creates a populace that wants to be "taken care of." Susan explains,

> You know, it just seems like everybody wants this healthcare, everybody wants government handouts, everybody wants [government] to pay for everything, you know, if you notice, there's free programs for everything and there's complete dependency where people are just complacent to be dependent instead of being self-sufficient. And then they complain when what they're being dependent on isn't good enough!

This framing is part of the "welfare discourse" according to which government aid undermines personal responsibility and self-reliance (Fraser and Gordon 1994; Misra, Moller, and Karides 2003). Health care reform (a topic that was regularly in the news at the time of these interviews) was mentioned by a number of respondents who felt that President Obama's policies were partly intended to increase people's dependency on government. It is important to point out that Susan's comments about the threat of government were offered spontaneously in the context of talking about the importance of concealed handgun licensing.

Like Susan, other respondents who emphasize the importance of self-reliance utilize dependency discourses that blame government policies for people who are unable or unwilling to take care of their own needs. I was initially surprised by how seamlessly respondents would weave government policies (or perceptions of government policies) and self-reliance into their explanations of the importance of CHLs and gun rights. For

example, when I asked June if she felt gun rights where threatened in this country, she said that she did and that she was concerned about government in general. She explains, "Obama is trying to cram everything that he wants down everybody's throats…If he could make this country like Hitler did, he would do it." June says that her biggest concern is that the government wants, "to take over everything." She continues,

> I think it's really sad, I mean, even seatbelts. Okay, yeah, I think…it's a shame that they have to make a law that you have to wear them. At the same time, if you don't wear 'em and you get hurt, it's going to be too bad, so sad, you take care of yourself. The government shouldn't have to pay to give you, what do you call it, disability or anything. If you're stupid enough not to put on a seatbelt and you get hurt, it's your own fault. And yeah, you can feel sorry for people, but at the same time, you know, you got to take responsibility for yourself.

This focus on government control and government-facilitated irresponsibility as a threat to individual liberty is identified by respondents as a cultural problem that manifests in a wide variety of social ills.

Adam explained his disdain for how the government interferes with personal liberties when he described his view that it is totally illogical to legally bar CHL holders from carrying their firearms in "gun free zones." Like most respondents, he says that someone who is intent on committing a crime will have no regard for whether an area is a gun free zone or not. Thus, the law,

> Works against the people who care, and this society in general is really starting to lean towards that whole mentality of punish the righteous. I mean, it's like with the mortgage deal and I'm in the real estate business so you know I have some strong…beliefs on it…You're rewarding bad behavior and punishing good behavior. I pay my mortgage on time; I've never been late; I always make sure I pay it. Yet, I can't get a reduction in my mortgage rate. But people who don't pay their mortgage the government says, 'Well okay, you really can't pay your mortgage, so here's what we're gonna do. We're gonna give you a three percent interest rate.' Well, I'm still paying eleven, because I pay my bills on time. It

> doesn't make any sense. You know. Hey guys, you can't bring your guns in here…but the guys who don't care about that are able to. So when someone stands up in that restaurant and says, 'Hey, everybody empty your wallets, I've got a gun!' The people with CHLs don't have guns. So they can't do anything about it.

Adam became visibly agitated as he explained his views. But curiously, Adam does not regularly carry his firearm in public. While "24/7 carriers" might feel vulnerable when they are unable to legally carry their guns into businesses where guns are not allowed, Adam is not one of those people. Instead, he feels a sense of moral outrage about what he sees as a society-wide tendency to "punish the righteous," which he constructs as those who value personal responsibility and self-reliance. This discrepancy suggests that Adam's CHL serves more as a symbol of his worldview than as practical tool that he uses for self-defense.

The extent to which moral outrage is a part of CHL licensing was evident in a different point in my interview with Adam when he said that there is a tendency for some people to suggest that crime is not a huge concern if it is only property crime. He says that while to a certain extent, he agrees (because his family's safety is his biggest priority), he also says that there should be a strong reaction against criminals because "It's not right for somebody to…rob you or hurt you or, you know, any of those, it's just, it's not, it's not right." Adam feels that what he refers to as "liberal" social policies and a tendency to dismiss non-violent crime have created a cultural climate that excuses bad behavior and "punishes the righteous." For many respondents, the government is a central part of the problem in this dynamic because it breeds a lack of personal

responsibility and threatens individual freedom, particularly for people who are doing "the right thing."

Concealed handgun licensing is described as a practice that allows people to exercise personal responsibility for their self-defense, but it is also a reaction to what some see as a cultural shift towards dependency and government control. Susan says that personal responsibility is directly tied to firearms because guns are one of the main ways that people are able to ensure that the government will not control every facet of their lives. Susan says that "There's a big divide of people who want to be taken care of and people who don't want to be taken care of. And the people who don't want to be taken care of are the same people who want to keep their guns." Susan says, "And so there's a whole breakdown and it just seems like somehow guns are right in the middle of keeping you separate from which side are you on?" Susan explains that guns are important not only for hunting and self-defense, but "it's about who we are as citizens." Susan clearly sees personal responsibility and irresponsibility as existing in a binary opposition, to which she has attached many other values including independence / dependence, empowered/powerless, and free/enslaved.

Like Susan, Mike shares the view that the government encourages dependency so that they can control the population. Mike says,

> There are two, in my mind, if you were to divide the American people into two groups, personal accountability and responsibility and the government is supposed to take care of it. Alright? These guys are gonna get funneled into concentration camps and put to work at whatever the government wants them to do. These guys are hopefully going to fight that…tyranny. Cause it's not, that's not what our founding fathers wanted out of government. You know?

Mike's comments point to what he believes the founding fathers intended when they included the second amendment to the constitution. Nearly every respondent interviewed said that they believed gun rights were threatened. Those who were most concerned made claims rooted in the fear that government control starts with firearm confiscation. Because they believe that self-reliance is the opposite of government intervention, they feel that personal freedom is hampered by an insistence on the social. This is why "the government" is lauded about as an umbrella term that encompasses any threat to personal liberty, whether in the form of government restrictions or welfare dependency. Concealed handgun licensing is seen as one step towards rejecting such constraints and reaffirming the importance of the individual.

Self-Reliance

Susan was the second person I interviewed for this project. Towards the end of our interview she asked me, "I don't know if you've found [this]. But do you notice that more of the people you are talking to with guns are also more on the survival prep page?" At the time I had not considered the connection between concealed handgun licensing and survival preparation. When I asked Mary about this link she said, "I think anybody that recognizes their mortality and that their mortality can come from outside of their health, has got to recognize the fact that your way of life, what you've got going, can be taken from you from outside forces. Whether it's natural or man-made is irrelevant. And most people, once you recognize that, tend to plan for other things as well."

According to my interviews, perspectives on the need for survival preparedness range from elaborate plans (including owning remote tracts of land, connections to larger

survivalist networks, and stores of nonperishable foods to last many months) to minimal planning (including having a location in mind to meet up with one's spouse and a store of food and water to last a few days). While those with elaborate plans tend to believe that the threat of societal collapse is a real possibility, those with more modest plans tend to prepare for natural disasters. John says that he is only concerned about having enough food and water for about a week. He lives in the Houston area and says that after devastating hurricanes it can sometimes take a week for basic infrastructure items (electricity, water, etc.) to get up and running.

Those with more extensive planning cite a range of potential calamities that could lead to societal collapse. When I told Mike that some of the people I had spoken with had discussed their self-reliance plans, he began to smirk and seemed somewhat embarrassed. Mike says that he and his wife have a plan including stockpiled food and water. They refer to it as their "SHTF Kit" or "Shit Hits the Fan Kit." Mike explains, "I'm not really dreamin' up any horrible scenario. I mean if it goes real bad to that extent, I mean, we all might be dead anyway. Freakin' nuke or something. But if it's just having to stay home because the uh, world health organization declares a level six pandemic and you're quarantined to your house for three weeks, well, we've got enough supplies to get us through that." Mike says, "It's very interesting to look at the level of authority that the world health organization has over us, U.S. citizens once, once the pandemic has been established. It's kind of scary. So yeah, that's one of the things that we talked about last year when this swine flu first started coming out." Later Mike said that he and his wife do not have a specific threat in mind. He elaborated,

> Let's put it this way, if something like what happened on September 11, 2001 was to happen again? You can bet that I'm not gonna sit around my office and ask my boss if I can leave. Alright? I'm, I'm hitting the road, because I know that my wife is on the way home, we're gonna meet there, get the kids, get our provisions and get out of the neighborhood. And uh, depending on if the roads are still available and not blocked, I'm either gonna go south to my friend's land, or north to family land.

Mike was uncomfortable and embarrassed with this discussion and said, "I'm gonna sound like a freakin conspiracy theorist when we start talking about this." When I assured him that he was not the only person I had interviewed who has a survival strategy, he seemed comforted, and it also seemed to reaffirm to him that CHL holders are a special class of citizen.

Susan was the first to bring up the importance of survival prep and she proved to have the most elaborate plans of any of the people I interviewed for this project. She and her husband have a large cache of weapons and ammunition, grains, canned goods, and powdered milk in the event that community infrastructure might break down. When I asked her to describe what types of events she imagines could unfold that would require that she utilize her resources, Susan explained that it could be anything: weather-related catastrophes, terrorism, government insurrections, and/or foreign military invasions. When Susan explained her family's plans she said

> I don't think we're extremists. I think we know people who are extremists. I think we are aware and we are listening. I think we're doing what's responsible, you know. If something bad was to happen, like even say weather-wise, we're not dependent on the government. And that goes hand in hand with having our guns. If we need to shoot our own food, we can. Or protect what we have. We have what people want. So, if something goes bad, like [Hurricane] Rita, could we protect what we have? You know. Yes, we could. Our neighbors? Not so much. You know, so it's, it kind of takes that step too why guns are so important,

> is to protect what we've acquired, not to let somebody else come in and take our food supply.

When I asked Susan if she feels responsible for protecting other people, for example her neighbors, Susan explained,

> You know what, it comes down to that there's people that we have prepared for. My parents who…don't understand, who kind of I think know we're doing this, but haven't taken any steps at all. My husband's parents, that's who he learned it from…through the Cold War [laughs]. You know, this was my in-laws thirty years ago or whatever. We have a social network of people that we know that is each collecting things, their portion so we come together in a central location. So we already have a community. Now we know that like my parents and maybe, my husband's brother who is not able to…his wife's not on board. But, you can't leave your brother and his wife out, and his kids.

Susan explains that because her sister-in-law is not "on board" with disaster preparedness, her husband's brother is not able to make what can amount to rather expensive plans. While Susan says that she and her husband feel a responsibility to provide for their immediate family (and here she includes her husband's brother), her next door neighbors would be a different story. She says you have to consider, "what can they offer? Unfortunately, the husband doesn't offer anything. The wife would offer [something], because she can cook and she can do certain things. She'd be somebody we'd consider taking along. Now let's say worst case scenario, end of the world type stuff, where like we have to rebuild. You know? They would be good because they have two daughters, I have two sons."

Though Susan's plans and ideas about societal collapse may seem extreme, I would suggest that they fit with the logic of individualism and emphasis on personal responsibility offered by the CHL holders I interviewed. In many ways, disaster

preparedness simply takes the CHL ethos to its logical conclusion: though individuals arm themselves for self-defense because of potential interpersonal crime, the worldview that shapes this practice can easily translate into much larger plans for much larger calamities.

It is important to emphasize that levels of preparedness and ideas about what might be an impetus for crisis vary widely among the CHL holders I interviewed. Some respondents have no plans at all, while others have very elaborate plans. It is also important to stress that it is not the case that all respondents believe in the most extreme forms of social collapse. George says, "I'm not waiting for Armageddon. I'm not waiting for 2012 for the world to come to an end; the zombies aren't coming over the hill; the Chinese aren't going to be at our borders; I'm not worried about that. I don't have a bunker down in the floor. I don't have three months of food stashed away somewhere buried. But I do know people that think that way."

For many respondents, CHLs are connected to survival preparation in a more simple way. John explains:

> We're not talking about hordes of zombies we're not talking about Y2K, a total societal collapse. We're talking about natural disasters, wild fires, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, earth quakes, etcetera. There have been dozens of situations in the past ten years where communities have had to go, you know people in the community have had to go off the grid for…three to five to seven days. And even the government's own website, the ready.gov has some good stuff on there about emergency preparedness. And yeah, personal defense is certainly a factor in that, because when things, when people get desperate, their willingness to escalate, when if you're poor and you've got eight children and they're hungry and you need stuff, maybe you're not normally willing to do certain things. But when you get desperate, you know, survival instincts are what they are. And unfortunately, then it becomes a bit more of an aggressive competition for resources for survival. And those that have planned ahead are

> going to have what they need. And those that have not are gonna be desperate. And so certainly that, that situation we would all like to believe we live in this wonderful, civilized world where nothing could possibly ever go wrong like that and situations couldn't breakdown.

Later John says, "There's never any harm done by being cautious. There's always harm, there's always risk for harm if you're reckless."

These interviews suggest that attitudes about self-reliance exist on a spectrum, as do disaster readiness plans. While some respondents have no survivalist plan, others have plans for post-apocalyptic scenarios. These scenarios which describe living beyond society, after society has collapsed, where only those who were most able to survive thanks to their lack of dependency on the government, may best be understood as fantasies of hyper-individualism. These are descriptions of scenarios in which only the strongest, most well-armed, most well-prepared survive. When explaining her perspective, Susan said, "It's basically gonna be God's way of thinning the herd. You know, those who choose reality and those who want the government to take care of them." According to this worldview, individualism is the measure of whether something is just, while "government" or "the social" is a constraint on personal freedom. What is critical here is that this reality is fundamentally anti-social. By anti-social, I mean that it rejects one of the most foundational elements that make society functional: social ties, built on mutual trust and shared interest allow communities to flourish.

CONCLUSION

Durkheim argued that crime serves a purpose for communities insofar as it helps to define a community's boundaries and reinforce its "collective conscience." These

interviews suggest that concealed handgun licenses serve as a totem around which "the good guy" status is constructed. I use the "good guys" versus "bad guys" construct because that is the language used by respondents. Like all binary constructions, the "good guy" needs the "bad guy" to make sense of himself. As Hill Collins writes, (2000, 70), "As the 'Others' of society who can never really belong, strangers threaten the moral and social order. But they are simultaneously essential for is survival because those individuals who stand at the margins of society clarify its boundaries."

What is clear from these interviews is that masculinity is hegemonic in these constructs: the common sense notion is that "good guys" and "bad guys" are men. Though the people I interviewed say that women are sometimes able to do what it takes to be prepared to handle threatening situations, that is not the default presumption. In addition to masculinity being hegemonic, hegemonic masculinity is central to these dynamics. "Good guys" are the "cream of the crop" of our communities, as they embody the traits of the ideal gun user propagated by groups like the NRA. The license signifies that they are not criminals, and their willingness to be armed is seen as representative of their courage. While not always explicitly invoked discourses of gender, race, and class are central to the meanings that shape the "good guy."

No figure makes them men I interviewed feel more physically vulnerable than the specter of the black criminal. They ascribe a menacing masculinity to men of color, and construct a sense of self in contradistinction. Because they assume that the black men they encounter are potentially armed and dangerous, they want to carry a concealed handgun. Having a gun allows them to maintain their confidence that they are capable of

responding to any threat. Like Adam at the gas station: should he get out of his car or drive off? Will he stand up to the threat or shirk from it?

It has been established that gang members—and other marginal men—can brandish and shoot guns to assert control and dominance over other men (Stretesky and Pogrebin 2007). The men I interviewed use guns in a similar way, but with profoundly different implications. When gang members use guns, they may be empowered in that instance by their masculine performance of domination, but it is also a sign of their marginalization. Indeed, the men Stretesky and Pogrebin (2007) interviewed were all incarcerated. In contrast, the men I interviewed are among the most privileged in society and already have access to culturally celebrated versions of masculinity: most of them are white and middle or upper-middle class, and all of them are heterosexual. Their state-issued license to carry a concealed handgun, a license that is expensive and only available to those who can afford it and who are not legally restricted, gives them an added level of privilege: it gives them a symbol around which they construct both an empowered and culturally celebrated masculinity.

Though both men and women used race as a signifier of potential criminality, the women I interviewed had far fewer examples of encountering men of color who they felt threatened by. The women identified two sources of threat: gang members and mentally ill school shooters. These distinctions are important for what they say about the ways in which race shapes ideas about culpability and social responsibility. While the school shooters "need help," the gang members "need" greater involvement in the criminal justice system. Rather than specify moments of contact with threat, the women I

interviewed were more likely to talk about criminal intent in the abstract, and to imagine the factors that make people criminals. Many of the discourses that shaped these images were loaded with "culture of poverty" rhetoric (Royce 2009) that linked dysfunction to blackness and poverty (concepts that were often used interchangeably). This is the "black cultural deficiency" perspective that Feagin and O'Brien (2003) argue many white Americans have of black Americans. Because respondents identify a constellation of factors that they suggest represent "black culture," they are avoiding overtly racist language while at the same time using race (and racism) to understand inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2001). Respondents lay much of the blame for the cultural dysfunctions on the "government" a vague term used to identify the source of dependency in poor communities.

In sharp contrast to dependency, those I interviewed see themselves as "self-reliant," and bound by an ethos of "personal responsibility." While others are over-determined by the social, they are unfettered individuals. I would like to suggest that the flipside of these condemnations is not the construction of "white cultural superiority," but the superiority of the individual. This focus on individualism is a characteristic discourse of whiteness (Bonilla-Silva 2001) because it obscures white privilege (Lewis 2004) by denying the various ways in which many white Americans benefit from their social location. Individualism is the ultimate "sincere fiction" of whiteness, and these interviews suggest that this is part of the appeal of CHLs. The self-reliance discourse, and fantasies of hyper-individualism contained in disaster preparedness and post-apocalyptic scenarios represent the logical conclusion of this construction. If society as

we know it were to disappear, the only people capable of survival would be those who have the wherewithal to survive. What this proposition masks is the interdependence that society is built upon; an interdependence that most benefits—and is most invisible to—those with privilege. Firearms generally, and concealed handgun licenses specifically, signify to those who use them that they are not dependent, not reliant on others, and instead are living out an ethos of personal responsibility.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

On February 26, 2012 seventeen year-old Trayvon Martin was walking from a nearby 7-11 to his father's girlfriend's house. George Zimmerman, 28, a concealed handgun licensee, was patrolling the neighborhood as a neighborhood watch captain (Barry et al. 2012). Zimmerman spotted Trayvon walking and called 9-11. Zimmerman told the dispatcher, "Hey, we've had some break-ins in my neighborhood and there's a real suspicious guy…this guy looks like he's up to no good or he's on drugs or something." As he described Trayvon to the dispatcher, Zimmerman repeatedly said "there's something wrong with him" and described the young man as reaching for his waistband. Sounding exasperated, Zimmerman said, "These assholes. They always get away." The dispatcher told Zimmerman to not follow the young man, but Zimmerman disregarded that order (Alvarez 2012).

Though it is not clear how the incident unfolded, what is known is that Zimmerman shot and killed Trayvon. Zimmerman says that he acted in self-defense after Trayvon punched him in the face and slammed his head into the ground, a claim that has been corroborated by some witnesses and is consistent with Zimmerman's injuries (Stutzman 2012). However, according to a young woman who was on the phone with Martin just prior to the shooting, he was trying to get away from an unknown man who was following him (Dahl 2012). While Zimmerman is claiming self-defense, it seems Martin had reason to believe he needed to defend himself as well. Because of a Florida law known as "Stand Your Ground," once Zimmerman felt threatened, he had no obligation to retreat, and was legally within his rights to use deadly force. The law not

only protects Zimmerman from prosecution—though a state prosecutor has reassessed the case and has charged Zimmerman with second degree murder—it also protects him from being sued in civil court (Alvarez 2012).

Exactly what happened on the evening George Zimmerman shot and killed Trayvon Martin is not yet clear. This incident unleashed a wave of media coverage about the role that race may have played in the shooting. Initial reports focused on whether Zimmerman was white or Hispanic. The 9-11 call Zimmerman placed was analyzed by "voice experts" who tried to determine if he used a racial slur. Black friends of George Zimmerman spoke out on his behalf and said they personally know that he is not racist. Geraldo Rivera claimed that if Martin had not been wearing a hooded sweatshirt (a "hoodie), he may not have been seen as a criminal. In all of these moments the meanings of race in the shooting of an unarmed black teenager are reduced to a simple equation: if Zimmerman is racist the shooting was likely racially motivated. Explaining race as significant to the extent that individuals are racist is an over-simplification of a much more complicated reality (Desmond and Emirbayer 2010).

Instead of focusing on whether Zimmerman is racist, it is important to analyze the larger context of social meanings that framed the interaction between Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman. What makes some men look "suspicious" and others seem like good candidates to be armed in public? Why are laws like Florida's "Stand Your Ground" expanding nation-wide? And what is the connection between such laws and discourses of individualism? These are the questions that will help us understand the

larger forces that shape incidents like that described above. And they are questions that can be addressed by this research.

Hegemony and the "Good Guy"

Interviews with CHL holders and participant observation at gun ranges and in CHL courses suggest that the ethos that shapes the practice of carrying a concealed firearm is the primacy of the individual. Indeed, it is emblematic of a hyper-individualism, which is perhaps why it is most appealing to white, financially privileged men who through dynamics of race, class, and gender hegemony, are the only ones who can truly make claims to individualism. White women and men of color are seen as products of their social locations—white women are presumed to be inherently vulnerable and dependent upon men, while men of color are seen as dangerous and as coming from dysfunctional communities. Women of color are invisible in these dynamics, except when Susan suggests that mothers of criminally affiliated black men are culpable. You might recall her comment that "the momma" on TV who claims her kid is good when he has a long rap sheet is not taking sufficient responsibility for his actions. Though there are discourses that people rely on to explain white women's vulnerability and black men's dangerousness, white men are unburdened by characterizations; when it comes to presumptions about "their tendencies," there is nothing to draw upon. This is one consequence of hegemonic whiteness (Hartigan 2005; Lewis 2004) and hegemonic masculinity (Connell1995): White men alone can be innocent until proven guilty.

Masculinity is hegemonic in these dynamics: "good guys" are in a perpetual struggle with "bad guys," and in both instances men and masculinity are central. Though the people I interviewed say that women are sometimes able to do what it takes to be prepared to handle threatening situations that is not the default presumption. The men I interviewed value aspects of masculinity that are celebrated in our culture, namely domination, the capacity for violence, aggression, control, and strength (Connell 1995; Kimmel 1996). They project these characteristics onto marginalized men when they presume that the black men they encounter are armed and may have criminal intent. They experience a sense of moral outrage about crime, and feel the need to respond. Rather than backing down to such figures, their concealed firearm allows them to stand-up to potential confrontation. Importantly, these confrontations are mostly imagined as few license holders will ever have an occasion to pull their guns from their holsters. Nevertheless, the knowledge that they could stand up to such moments allows men to make claims to an idealized version of masculinity.

"Good guys" are the "cream of the crop" of our communities, as they embody the traits of the ideal gun user propagated by groups like the NRA (Connell 1995; Melzer 2009; O'Neill 2007). According to these discourses, holding a concealed handgun license signifies that a person is not a criminal, and their willingness to be armed is a sign of their courage. In this way, they are able to make claims to hegemonic masculinity, those versions of masculinity that are most culturally celebrated (Connell and Messerschdmit 2005). By asserting the importance of protecting their families from danger, and standing up to criminals who have no regard for the law, CHL holders can

claim the status of the "good guy." Thus, their CHLs allow them to carry a symbol with which a more empowered sense of self can be crafted. The social construction of the "good guy" hinges on beliefs about moral goodness, courage, and the willingness to "do what it takes" to protect innocent people from criminals, and these constructions are central to how those I interviewed make sense of their firearm carrying.

My analysis of interviews with women who have a CHL suggest that women frame their gun carrying very differently than men do. While the men focused on defending others from crime, most of the women I interviewed spoke of carrying a gun as "empowering." This discourse is tied to the notion that women are "natural victims." Because they are on average smaller than men, and because they are objects of heterosexual men's desire, women are socialized from a young age to see themselves as vulnerable to male aggression (Hollander 2001; McCaughey 1997; Stanko 1995), this is particularly true of white women (Madriz 1997). Having a gun, a self-defense tool that "equalizes" the size differences between men and women, erases one of the primary sources of women's vulnerability: a belief that their size or relative lack of strength leaves them vulnerable to attack.

It is also clear that women find their gun use to be empowering because they have received various cultural messages throughout their lives that guns are "men's things." The cultural link between men and guns leads women to believe that they will not be able to handle firearms. When they learn to shoot, and when they realize that they are good shots, or that they enjoy shooting, they are often thrilled by their prowess.

Empowerment is particularly significant for those women who were victims of violent crime. While one woman I interviewed was stalked and threatened, another, Caroline, was abducted and raped. From that moment on, Caroline always carried a gun with her. Both women who were victims of crime had always seen themselves as strong and invulnerable. Yet they were victimized. Carrying a concealed firearm restores their sense of personal strength, and thus, it is empowering. While the women I interviewed say that they are empowered by carrying a firearm, it seems clear that many women rely on their husbands for protection when they are with them. This dynamic further entrenches the "man-as-protector" dynamic, even for women who are licensed to carry a gun. As I argue, this contributes to cultural meanings that suggest women are naturally vulnerable to men's aggression (Hollander 2001).

Many of the women I interviewed relish the notion that they are different than other women, women who are unwilling to take their defense into their own hands with a firearm. According to my analysis, there is a significant unintended consequence of this form of self-defense that has implications for understanding gender and victimization. Some of these women locate their strength and empowerment in their firearm. As they develop "situational awareness," they experience an increased vigilance against potential threat. When they are unarmed, this has the consequence of increasing their feelings of vulnerability. It as though their sense of empowerment resides in their gun, not in themselves, ultimately limiting the extent to which carrying a concealed firearm empowers those women who use this form of self-defense.

Interviews with people who are licensed to carry a concealed firearm in public suggest that traditional fear of crime is not a motivating factor in why people want a CHL. Very few of the people interviewed for this study are motivated by fear. Those who did explain that fear compelled them to be armed were all women. Though few respondents said that fear motivated their desires to be armed, these interviews do suggest that perceptions of vulnerability primarily revolve around whether people feel able to physically dominate another person. Firearms are a major piece of the puzzle of vulnerability, particularly when respondents insist that criminals are always armed. The question ultimately becomes who can dominate whom. When everyone has a gun, the only person who has a chance to not be dominated is the one who has trained most, is the quickest draw, and is most accurate.

As I suggest, the process of becoming a CHL holder includes learning that we are all much more at risk of violent crime than we may have otherwise realized. Learning to anticipate victimization creates a dynamic of hyper-vigilance in public places that many of the respondents, particularly those who are highly trained, discussed at length. I argue that this vigilance is a threat to social ties, as perceptions of danger lead many people to be wary of strangers, and in some cases, makes them unwilling to interact with unfamiliar people. Though this may certainly lessen the chance that they will be victimized, at what costs?

Discourses of personal responsibility shape the practice of carrying a concealed firearm. Statistics on police response times were often invoked by those I interviewed, who argue that it is not simply foolish to think that the police can save you from violent

crime, it is irresponsible. Respondents expressed a moral outrage about the extent to which personal responsibility is lacking in the United States. For some, this moral failing is attributable to a culture of entitlement and government dependency, and such characterizations are deeply racialized. Many of the discourses that shaped these images reflected a "culture of poverty" rhetoric (Royce 2009) that linked dysfunction to blackness and poverty (concepts that were often used interchangeably). Respondents blame these cultural dysfunctions on the "government," a vague term used to identify the source of dependency in poor communities. To these respondents, government intervention in peoples' lives is a threat to self-reliance and individualism.

For some respondents, the focus on self-reliance extends to elaborate disaster preparedness. These respondents maintain what I call "fantasies of hyper-individualism" according to which society will break down, leaving individuals to fend for themselves. For those respondents who have extensive plans, these scenarios represent the individualistic ethos at its logical conclusion: existing outside of society, only those unfettered by social constraints will survive. As I argue, this is the appeal of concealed handgun licensing for those I interviewed: CHL holders are the embodiment of the absolute individual. These are discourses that resonate deeply with masculinity and whiteness (Lewis 2004).

These findings are able to provide context for the larger issues surrounding the Trayvon Martin shooting. Zimmerman was heavily involved as a neighborhood watch captain and was studying to become a police officer (Barry et al. 2012). According to reports, Zimmerman started the neighborhood watch as a response to a rash of break-ins

in his neighborhood. By all accounts, he was simply trying to "do the right thing." It seems Zimmerman was fed-up with criminals "getting away" with crimes; he wanted to be the "good guy," and to fight back. Given gun lobby rhetoric (Connell 1995; Melzer 2009; O'Neill 2007), and larger cultural representations of heroes fighting "bad guys" (Gibson 1994), such characterizations represent an idealized version of masculinity that likely influenced Zimmerman's desire to obtain a concealed handgun license, carry a firearm, and patrol his neighborhood. Had Zimmerman been unarmed, he might have been less likely to approach Martin, and might instead have waited for the police to arrive. Without the capacity to dominate another person, he may have felt less emboldened, and more cautious about whether he should approach.

Additionally, had Zimmerman not occupied the role of the "good guy," he may have not been so quick to see Trayvon Martin as a "bad guy." Of course, this does not mean the police would have used better discretion, or that they themselves might not have assumed Martin was a criminal. But they would have been more likely to use "rules of engagement" that are intended to mitigate the potential for unnecessary uses of force. Moreover, their roles as police officers would have made the situation clearer (though perhaps no less frightening and fraught with danger for a young black male).

It is not possible to know exactly why Zimmerman considered Martin suspicious, but determining if George Zimmerman personally harbors anti-black sentiments will not define whether race shaped how Zimmerman saw Martin. Most Americans associate black men with criminality because of the meanings that exist about black masculinity in our culture (Connell 2006; Russell 2009). Pegging Zimmerman as a racist blurs that

reality and allows the rest of us to project racism onto an individual rather than taking account for the various ways racism is embedded in American culture (Desmond and Emirbayer 2010).

Limitations

There are some important limitations in this study that should be addressed by future research. One of the most glaring is the lack of interviews with black CHL holders. Given the abundant evidence that black men are regularly considered criminal suspects, black men with CHLs will likely have very different experiences than those people I interviewed. For example, do black CHL holders feel confident that they will be presumed to be law-abiding? What is their interaction with the police like? What motivates their desires to be armed? Do black men and black women have experiences and motivations that are similar to or different from the white women I interviewed in this project?

Interviews should also be conducted in states outside of Texas to examine how state laws and regional contexts impact the way license holders experience carrying a firearm in public. For example, does Florida's "Stand Your Ground" law impact how license holders think about crime and impact their willingness to be armed? These questions have important implications as states model each other's legislation, and the current trend is in the direction of more expansive rights for concealed firearm carrying.

Implications

This research on concealed handgun licensing is not intended to minimize the reality that crime exists; however, it is intended to provide a critical analysis of the larger

meanings that shape the practice of carrying a concealed firearm. The concealed handgun license holders I interviewed would likely disagree with my assessment that the move towards expanding concealed handgun licensing is problematic. For them, self-defense is not only important it is critical in an increasingly dangerous world. Larry says, "Most people have this delusion that the world's this warm happy place, and for most of them, it is. But that's only because nothing's happened to them yet. Some of them go their whole lives and nothing ever happens. Some of them it happens when they're young, they're old, they're in between, it just depends." And Tina explains, "If it was all rainbow dust and unicorns, a perfect world, we'd never need it, would we? No. Did I ever think I would need to carry? No. But I'm logical." It cannot be denied that there is some truth to what Larry and Tina are saying. Take the example of Caroline, who was abducted and raped in a parking garage. Does her example suggest that women should not be vigilant against those they do not know? Crime happens and it sometimes violent and horrific. To pretend otherwise is naïve and dangerous, and it minimizes the very real pain that victims of crime have felt.

Though crime certainly does happen, it is important to put criminalization into context, to understand how much crime happens, where it happens, and to whom. One of the most problematic aspects of concealed handgun licensing is that it focuses a disproportionate amount of attention on white men and women in suburban areas as potential victims, when victimization rates for those groups are very low. Meanwhile, black men and women in inner-city areas have a much greater likelihood of being victimized (Anderson 1999; Cooper and Smith 2011; Jones, N. 2009; Miller 2008). To

take homicide as an example, in 2008 the homicide rate for white women age 18 to 24 was 2.6 per 100,000. By comparison, the rate for black men age 18 to 24 was 91.1 per 100,000 (Cooper and Smith 2011). Victimization is a sign of marginalization, and it is a condition made worse by the fact that black victimization is often invisible in American culture. Instead of seeing the relatively low victimization rates that exist in predominantly white, suburban communities as a sign of social privilege, we are living in a cultural moment where people in those areas are being encouraged to take up arms. The discourses around concealed handgun licensing ignore dynamics of social privilege and inequality, and instead focus on ways to arm those who are the least likely to be victims of violent crime against the "criminal other."

CONCLUSION

The Trayvon Martin shooting is a tragic example of what can happen when a person who is armed with lethal force relies on their perceptions to make sense of risk, threat, and vulnerability. Our perceptions are shaped by social constructions, influenced by media representations and cultural discourses laden with power. As I have argued here, one important way in which power operates in society is through the cultural construction of "good guys" and "bad guys." It shapes not only how we see each other, it also impacts how we think about a range of social phenomena including the fairness of the criminal justice system, and whether we give credence to the "culture of poverty." As is evident from this research, race, class, and gender are central to the meanings that shape the "good guy" construct.

This research makes clear that individualism is at the heart of what makes concealed handgun licensing appealing. It is also one of the reasons that this self-defense tactic is so consequential. When the dominant rhetoric of crime control in the United States has shifted toward arming individuals, allowing greater access in public spaces for firearms, and expanding public spaces where handguns can be carried, individualism becomes more deeply entrenched. This moves us further from viewing social problems, including crime, through a social lens. When our ability to see the social is occluded, this limits the extent to which we may be willing to invest in crime control strategies that are socially beneficial rather than those that are focused on individuals. For example, a focus on the social would allow us to see that some of our current crime control strategies, namely incarceration, exacerbate problems in marginalized communities (Freudenberg 2001). Additionally, a focus on the social would reveal that access to quality employment and educational opportunities impact crime rates (Reiman and Leighton 2010). Ultimately, the further entrenchment of individualism is potentially devastating for marginalized communities already suffering the consequences of an individualistic ethos (Royce 2009). Individualism is an edifying discourse for those who are privileged, but it is profoundly damaging for everyone else.

Appendix I

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

NAME*	SEX	AGE	RACE / ETHNICITY	EDUCATION	ESTIMATED INCOME
Adam	M	36	White	High School Degree	$61-80,000
Allison	F	30	White	Advanced Degree	$61-80,000
Alex	M	26	White	High School	$21-40,000
Ashley	F	30	Hispanic	High School	$81-100,000
Bill	M	38	White	Technical (Military)	$101,000 +
Caroline	F	67	White	College Degree	$81-100,000
Catherine	F	35	White	College Degree	$41-60,000
Chris	M	63	White	College Degree	$41-60,000
Cindy	F	39	White	College Degree	$41-60,000
David	M	66	White	Advanced Degree	$21-40,000
George	M	40	Hispanic	College Degree	$101,000 +
Gil	M	65	White	High School Degree	$101,000 +
Greg	M	57	White	High School Degree	$101,000 +
Jack	M	46	White	College Degree	$101,000 +
Jackie	F	53	White	College Degree	$101,000 +
Jeff	M	48	Latino & White	College Degree	$81-100,000
John	M	44	White	Advanced Degree	NA
Joseph	M	45	White & Hispanic	Associates Degree	$81-100,000
June	F	67	White	High School Degree	$61-80,000
Krysti	F	37	White	College Degree	$41-60,000
Larry	M	54	White	Associates Degree	NA
Leo	M	52	Hispanic	Advanced Degree	$101,000 +
Lisa	F	44	White	High School Degree	$61-80,000
Mark	M	34	White	High School Degree	$61-80,000
Mary	F	53	White	College Degree	NA
Matt	M	46	White	Trade School	$81-100,000
Mike	M	36	White	College Degree	$101,000 +
Molly	F	36	White	College Degree	$81-100,000
Paul	M	34	White	Technical (Military)	$61 - 80,000
Rachel	F	41	White	Advanced Degree	$41-60,000
Richard	M	38	White	College Degree	$101,000 +
Ruth	F	53	White	High School Degree	$101,000 +
Steven	M	30	White	Advanced Degree	$101,000 +
Susan	F	33	White	High School Degree	$81-100,000
Tina	F	47	American Indian	College Degree	NA
Wendy	F	50	White	High School Degree	$41-60,000

* All names are pseudonyms.

Appendix II

Interview Schedule

BACKGROUND:

1. When did you first start to shoot guns? Describe your earliest memories with guns.
2. Did your family have guns when you were growing up?
3. Who first taught you how to use a gun?
4. Did you purchase your first gun or receive it as a gift?
5. What type of gun was that?
6. Do you hunt?
7. How often do you go shooting?
8. Do you have children?
9. Do you shoot or hunt with your children?
10. Are you married? How does your wife / husband / partner feel about guns?

EARLY CHL EXPERIENCES:

11. Do you currently have a CHL?
12. How long was it between the time you owned your first gun and you got your CHL?
13. When did you first consider getting a concealed handgun license?
14. Can you describe how you became interested in getting a license?
15. Was there a particular experience that made you want to get a concealed handgun license?
16. Did you start to carry right away?
17. When you first started carrying, how did it feel?
18. Do many of your friends or co-workers have CHLs?

CHL CARRYING PRACTICES:

19. When do you carry a firearm?
20. On a typical day, as you get ready to leave your house, describe how you decide whether or not to carry a gun.
21. Are there particular times or places where you always carry your gun?
22. Are there places where you never feel the need to carry a gun?
23. Have you ever had an experience where you didn't have your gun with you and you felt physically threatened?
24. Can you describe how your behavior changes when you are carrying a concealed gun? For example if alcohol is around.

25. Is there any situation you can describe where you'd feel really unsafe if you didn't have your gun with you?
26. Do you feel like you need to carry a gun more often when your (wife / husband) or children are with you?
27. Have you ever had a situation arise where you thought you might have to use your gun? Can you describe that situation?
28. What did you use for self-defense before you had a CHL?
29. If you didn't have the right to carry a gun, what would you use to protect yourself?

GUN FREE ZONES:

30. In general, what are your thoughts on gun free zones?
31. Do you ever avoid restaurants or other establishments where gun free zone signs are posted?
32. Specifically which places do you avoid because of their policies on guns?
33. Are there any gun free zones that you think should be gun free?
34. Do you ever disregard a sign when you see that guns are prohibited?
35. Have you ever pulled your concealed weapon?

VIEWS ON CHLS AND GUN RIGHTS

36. Why is it important for you to have the right to carry a concealed weapon?
37. I think a lot of people who don't understand why others would want to have a CHL think that they don't need to carry a gun to protect themselves because that is what the police are for. How would you respond to that?
38. As a gun owner, do you fear that gun rights are threatened in this country? Is that specific to this administration? What about the Clinton era?
39. A lot of people I've spoken with say that they carry a gun because they are self-reliant people. Is that a motivating factor in why you carry a gun?
40. Others have talked about this self-reliance extending into other aspects of their lives, where they plan for all kinds of unforeseeable eventualities (e.g. natural disasters, epidemics, hostile take overs, terrorist attacks). Is that something you share? Have you planned for such events?

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